

# VINGENTIANA

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**FEATURE:**  
**The Popular Mission**

# Preface

*Emeric Amyot d'Inville, C.M.*

From July 7 till August 2 a Vincentian Month took place in Paris, discussing the Popular Mission. More than 69 participants from 26 different countries and 35 Provinces of the C.M. joined the meeting.

For the first time this meeting gathered not only members of the C.M.(a Bishop, 53 priests and 1 brother), but also 9 Sisters and 5 lay persons who generally work with us for our missions. Their presence has been a clear enrichment for everybody and witness how lively is the cooperation of the Congregation with the Sisters and lay people.

Moreover the Month proved to be the opportunity of a deep exchange among missionaries, through the lectures - most of them were provided by the participants themselves - and the moments of sharing of experiences. The participants could share both in a large group and divided by linguistic groups. Everybody could experience such an extreme variety among us, but also a substantial convergence around the same Vincentian charisma.

Many guided tours throughout France, visiting our principal Vincentian places (Folleville, Paris, le Berceau and Châtillon) were most appreciated and represented a meaningful pilgrimage going back to our roots. The peak of spiritual enjoyment was the trip to Berceau, where Fr. Maloney gave a day retreat and gave birth to a moment of sharing among all the participants.

At the end of the Vincentian Month a «Final Document» has been drawn up. It has been consigned to the Superior General. In this document there are 10 proposals, approved by the participants, in order to give popular mission a new stimulus among us.

*Vincentiana* is proud to publish in this issue both all the texts of the talks given during the Vincentian Month and the «Final Document». May all that be a contribution for those who are engaged in the Popular Mission and in the Congregation.

# What type of mission?

*Luis M. Martínez San Juan, C.M.*

## **Presuppositions:**

The title gives you an idea of the content of this presentation. Actually, because of both the many different starting points and theologies that underlie our idea of Mission, and the varied concrete situations of you who listen to this talk, the task of *special evangelization* that we refer to with the classical word "mission" has to adapt itself to various styles. The very language that we use indicates this to us. We speak of preaching missions, organizing missions, doing missions, or simply missioning.

We have come here for this month because we want *to seek and find* our place within the Church and our societies. In my own experience, I have seen that if we live out certain presuppositions clearly, we will get the desired results. What are they?

1. The first and most basic presupposition consists in *evangelizing "from within" and "by" the community*. The community *is and ought to be* that which evangelizes (i.e., the community is the missionary). We offer some assistance. We are not the goal, but only the instruments, the means.

Saint Vincent insists on this very clearly, and just so we don't consider ourselves so important, he calls us "simple servants" to serve grand masters... And although today, the theological and pastoral atmosphere has changed, and we can not apply this term literally, it is good to recall a warning from Saint Vincent. He counsels us:

*Give great honor and respect to the pastors and vicars of the places where we go. Don't do anything against their good pleasure, not even by saying just a few words, especially about important affairs. (XI,103/XI,30)*

2. The second presupposition is that we have to treasure the real world in which we find ourselves and start from there. There is no value to a system that, however good it might be, we would apply indiscriminately to all the different places we go. Saint Vincent said that the missionary has to *adapt to the specific circumstances, persons, place and times. (I,227/274)*

3. However, some *lines of action* and *clear goals* have to be set. And to help present them, I am going to speak about a new "model" of doing missions.

## **Observations:**

The model that I propose has been tried out and adapts well to communities that have been "Christianized." Therefore, knowing that you can adapt it in various ways to all situations, it can be positive and useful for *any community*.

The time that I have at my disposal now does not allow me to develop all the steps that have been carefully thought out so they have a certain sense, a certain logic... Nevertheless, materials exist where this process is explained and developed.



And, if I am not able to spend enough time on aspects that you might find interesting, there is always the possibility of dialogue at some other time.

## **A style - a form**

### **1. Time of preparation**

#### **1. First Dialogue**

The process of this kind of Mission normally begins with a *first meeting* with the responsible pastoral workers of the place or region where we intend to give a mission (pastoral team, pastor(s) . . . , and some of the members of our Mission Team).

Some interesting points can be dealt with in this first "dialogue," principally:

1. Exchange ideas about the theme of the Mission. List together all the concerns of the community and the missionaries:
  - *Why* are they asking for a Mission? What are their hopes for the mission?
  - *What* are we able to offer them? *How* do we understand each other?
2. Reaching an agreement on a basic Ecclesiology. It is important to see the agreements and differences in this theological-pastoral area clearly.
3. See the real possibilities for a joint plan.

#### **2. Presentation**

In the first encounter with the parish that is about to have a mission, it is important to offer a clear preview, including some basic ideas as to what the process of the mission will be like.

It is good to make very clear that the process of the mission that we are presenting (and logically, the preparation) has to *adapt itself to the concrete reality* of the place of the mission and to the conditions of the people (clergy and laity) who are going to promote this *process*.

#### **3. To evangelize from the standpoint of the reality**

Our mission has to be an "Evangelization that has its roots in the real world." We know that God is a *God of life* and that the suffering of humanity is not foreign to Him: *I have seen the oppression of my people...I have heard their cries...I have fixed my eyes on their sufferings.* (Exodus 3,7). With these words, God initiates the History of our Salvation.

The desire to answer this call of God to serve the needs of humanity is the distinctive mark of the Mission, according to Saint Vincent: *"For this reason, all the world will think that this little company is from God -- because it is seen taking care of the most serious and forgotten needs."*(SV XI,90/XI, 396). Therefore, if we want to be faithful to Saint Vincent, we must make a mission plan that pays close attention to reality. The important thing is that it not be "our plan." It is important that it be God's plan, which we can discover by being attentive to the *Spirit* speaking to us through the signs of the times.

If we do not do this, our mission will be just indoctrination, imposition. . . God asks us, as we are reminded in contemporary theology, to inculturate the faith. And to do this, we must make ourselves *very conscious of the real conditions*.

So this task of evangelizing "from the reality" brings us to recognize that the seed of the Gospel produces its fruits in the concrete history and events of humanity: "*The reign of God is upon us*" (Luke 11,20). It is necessary to discover and exploit the positive realities. There are events (signs of the Kingdom) that manifest them.

Contrary to the Vincentian spirit is the idea of *self sufficiency* by the person who believes that "to Evangelize is only to give and not to receive." Such an attitude would make our task unacceptable. But, mainly, it includes nothing of evangelization. As we recall from *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, in the mission we are going "to evangelize and be evangelized." And this has to happen. These words cannot be "empty words."

Permit me to remind you of two necessary activities or steps in this contact with the reality:

A) Be attentive to the Reality . . .

"To evangelize from within the real situation" demands that we give *careful attention* in order to be able to respond to *the concrete needs* of the mission community and of the people with whom we will come into contact;

B) . . . so we can Make the Effort to Transform the Reality.

To do this, you have to make a "Plan" for the future. It must be realistic, do-able, one that takes into account everything as it really is, and gradual enough that it doesn't present impossible tasks. And it has to be an ongoing plan. You can never say "It's done!"

So as not to prolong this part, I am not going to refer to the concrete actions that have to be carried out to investigate the true conditions in different meetings or interactions with the parish.

I want to make perfectly clear that the whole process searches for what is real and ends with a time of *discernment*:

With regard to the collection of data, it is worthwhile to use critical, diagnostic, judgment of the situation. For this work of discernment, you need an atmosphere that makes it easy to hear both the voice of God and the voices of the People. Be careful not to stifle the truth!

This work of discernment puts us in a position to deal with the key problems of the people and the parish community, the problems that will face us on the mission.

*The mission begins* with this study of the real situation. The Parish Community has placed itself in a "*state of mission*".

#### 4. Setting the Objectives

Concrete objectives need to be formulated. They are based on: A) an awareness of the real situation, B) on the one hand, the "principles of the Vincentian Mission" and on the other, the invitations and challenges that the concrete reality throws out at us, C) with an eye on the concrete needs, the human condition and the faith of the community.

#### 5. The Mission Program

Now we're ready to organize a *specific program* that, as I have said, has to be strong and clear in giving *real and concrete answers*. "The generic human being" does not exist; what we are dealing with are real people with real concerns, real needs and real problems.

## II. The Real Heart of the Mission

\*\*\* Continuing the theme, but taking some liberties with it, I am going to continue about the ideal form of the Main Part of the Mission, which would be this model of the "Vincentian Mission Plan" to which I have just referred. Let me warn you that I am going to make reference only to the *principles*, the pillars that sustain the structure of the mission, because the *concrete form* that the mission adopts *has to vary* according to the real situation that we encounter.

How are we going to work during a mission? In the same way Jesus did. For this reason, we are going to proceed step by step, reminding ourselves of the Gospel and looking for the necessary elements of this extraordinary evangelical action that we call by the classical name "mission."

#### 1. Encounter Days: the Visits.

When Jesus walked along the road, he did it with a certain style. Remember the dialogue with the Samaritan? (Jn 4). As you know, Jesus' discussion with this woman, who was not one of the "faithful" women, was a dialogue *full of respect for the person*.

Jesus does not impose himself. He enters with simplicity into the world of this woman: He "offers to talk with her with his heart", always mindful of the dignity of the person. In the same way, Jesus deals with Zacheus. Only in the case of Zacheus, Jesus takes the initiative and invites himself: *Today, I want to eat at your house*.

The mission should begin in the same way. We dedicate some days (one week, two weeks,...) to visiting so we can *situate ourselves with all the people of the place of the mission*. We *greet them* in the name of the parish (of the catholic community). We *explain the program* of the mission to them so they get the information first hand. In this way, we *give them a direct personal invitation*. If the people visited want to engage in a dialogue, we spend some time with them. If not, we greet them, tell them the program, and move along...

And all the time, we maintaining a great respect for them and follow the advice of Jesus: *In whatever house you enter, first give your peace to the people*. This is what we want to do-- "be messengers of life and peace".

In summary, all the settings of ordinary life in the town are *sacred places* of encounter: the house, the market place, the bars, the school, the doctor's waiting room...God enters these places and comes close to each person and to all persons.

\*\*\*We have to mention here that during this first part of the main time of the mission we take the opportunity to prepare *the pastoral staff of the place*. This is an indispensable part of every mission that sets up the basis for an effective continuation of the mission. The pastoral staff of the parish, as we will see in a future part of this presentation, will be our collaborators in the last stage of the mission.

## 2. Proclamation of the Saving Word

This is the way Jesus presented it, saying:

*The time has come and the Kingdom of God is near: repent and believe in the Good News.* (Jn. 1,15)

We, like Jesus, will also dedicate some days to this same task. During the days of the mission, we look to:

- + Bring the joy of the good news of God to a world full of bad news.
- + In a world full of evil and malice, make very clear that God has begun to rule and that united with Him, we will be able to do away with the injustice, the lies, the lack of honesty, the pain, the evil...

We work to achieve our plan, assuring that *the atmosphere* of the Good News permeates everyone. And not only by preaching, which is very important for one week, but through the personal announcing that we are doing continually among everyone in the place.

But, as I have just said, we realize this proclamation principally through the *preaching*: preaching in a variety of forms and with content adjusted to the hearer's age. There is a big difference between a session with adults, with elderly, with Youth, with Children, or with young married couples. We want the preaching to be alive and dynamic! And we present various themes to achieve this.

To do this, we divide the population according to age groups or types of people as we deem necessary in order that the message reach and touch the heart of each person.

The religious and the laity *collaborate* and *even coordinate* the preaching, in their distinct ways and according to their group.

This is the time for the call to conversion. There is a personal call to all to change the attitudes of the heart that are not life-giving. Because today, in a materialistic and selfish world, good people are needed more than ever: people *with clean hearts, that struggle for peace, and are concerned for justice...children of God*. The Pope even says that we need some experts in human living.

During the time dedicated precisely to the preaching (one week normally) we also invite the people to a series of *celebrations*; such as: the opening sermon, a Penitential Celebration, Children's Celebrations, Marian Celebrations, Celebration of the Sacrament of

the Sick, and other celebrations with the elderly, the whole Assembly of the People of God, Family Day, etc...

But, I want to warn you that if the celebration is not a constitutive element in the Vincentian tradition, and if we find ourselves with the problem of excessive sacramentalization in detriment to the process of evangelization, we will evaluate the need for these celebrations to see whether they are going to reach the people and provoke some impetus to conversion to the Gospel. If not, we would leave them out.

All these correspond as I said to the second section of the Main Part of the Mission. And it normally lasts for one week.

### **3. Group Gatherings**

The third section of the main part of the Mission, and the last section, we dedicate to calling together "small groups" of the whole community. These groups are called Encounter Groups, because they allow people *to meet with* others, with the roots of their own faith, and with God... These meetings take place *in the homes* of neighbors.

Let us listen to St. Paul:

*Greetings to Priscilla and Aquila, my collaborators in the work of Jesus Christ, who gave themselves for me that I might be saved; not only am I grateful to them, but all the pagan church as well. Greetings to the community that **meets in your house.*** (Rom. 16, 3-5).

As you know, that primitive church that began to *actualize itself* in the midst of an unbelieving world came together in small groups to vitalize themselves, and to live together in faith and charity. They did this in a simple way, in their usual places of gathering, in their homes...

Something like this is what we are accustomed to have during the "5 days" of the mission. This, *at first*, seems complicated and difficult. But, in the end, it is what works best and is enjoyed most. In a small group, it is much easier to be personal and to delve more deeply into one's faith. It is the most catechetical aspect of the entire mission. Let us not forget that Saint Vincent wanted the mission to be a short "catechesis". This catechesis in family groups, as we will see farther ahead, normally continues through the heart of the mission.

From the very beginning of the Time of Preparation, we are motivating the members of the parish community to offer themselves for these tasks:

- 1) Place their houses on the list for small groups.
- 2) Animate a Gathering Group

We work to make them see that these tasks are not difficult. We assure them that the missionary team that comes in from outside will help them to prepare and will "accompany" them.

Throughout all this, it is not easy to organize the group of "pastoral agents of the place" (Animators) until we encourage them and motivate them to do this during the first part of the main mission.

### III The Time of Continuity

You have probably noticed that the traditional terminology that the Vincentian Mission has been using from the time of Bogota, has been changed a little here. Instead of talking about the *pre-mission, the mission, and the postmission*, we have been talking about *the preparation, the heart of the mission, and continuity*.

This way of speaking is not due to an intellectual quirk. It comes out of pastoral reflections and observations. We want to avoid saying at the end of the mission "*finally, the mission is completed*". No! The dynamic missionary or evangelizer never ought to be absent from the Christian Community. For this reason, and from our point of view, the mission is a process that 1) is prepared, 2) has a most intense period (Heart of the Mission), 3) and later has a continuity or follow up...

An important question is, when does the follow up begin? According to the dynamic that I have been proposing, it begins in the intense moment of the mission. However, there is a special point in our work plan where we can put the foundation of this continuity. This is what we call PEOPLE OF GOD ASSEMBLIES OR PARISH ASSEMBLIES.

One day before finishing the intense period of the mission, we gather the whole parish community, and in small groups, the opportunity is given to express themselves. This Parish Assembly is a *celebration of the faith in the Spirit that blows where it wills*.

As an Italian Bishop said,

*we priests talk too much and do not listen enough to the people.*

In the Parish Assembly, the opposite is true -- the people have the opportunity to speak out. But, as believers, we know that the Spirit manifests itself through the people. At the end of the Assembly, it is good to be able to affirm: "*the Spirit of the Lord and ourselves say to you. . .*". This is a good way to reach the conclusion of the mission and to encourage some commitments. And this is the best way to organize the follow up of the mission.

+ Having said this, let me remind you, now that we are in family, that the great Vincentian institutions came about *for the mission*.

Our little Company is of the mission and for the mission; The lay institutions, like the Ladies of Charity, arose during the mission, and are there to develop the works of charity throughout the mission; that special group of lay persons that are the Daughters of Charity, have their meaning in the intention of Saint Vincent and Saint Louise to make the fruit of the mission grow in its double gifts of catechesis and service. The seminaries were a solution Saint Vincent instituted because of his concern for the continuity of the mission.

Saint Vincent observed that the fruit of the mission will never last without some good priests.

*The most important aspect of our vocation is to labor for the salvation of the poor country people, and everything else is secondary; we would never have worked with ordinands nor in ecclesiastical seminaries if we had not judged that good ecclesiastics were necessary to serve the people and conserve the fruits of the missions, imitating in this way the great conquerors, who leave a small garrison in the plazas that they*

*occupy, fearful to lose that which they have concurred with so much effort. (XI,133/XI, 55).*

What do we try to do during this time of continuity? I will attempt to summarize these distinct tasks in 6 categories:

1. ***Offer information.*** For this, we have to be prepared to present some accessible guides so that the community, on its own, can continue to realize its plan of continuity. To do this, we must take seriously "study" for the mission and a certain level of specialization. This task is similar to what Saint Vincent realized with the priests: help, orientation, counsel...

2. Continue with the ***formation of pastoral agents***, always and whenever they ask us to do this, providing 2 or 3 days of formational gatherings. Of all the ways possible to do this, it seems like the best is to go back to the community where we gave a mission. But always with the permission of the pastor. Without permission, we should avoid going back.

3. It is normal that the ***groups continue***. And as usually happens, if there is a lack of simple materials for the people, we ought to continue supplying materials adapted to the groups that vary according to circumstances and ages.

A special and important group is Young Married Couples that have children (sometimes many) who are energized to evangelize. (That the Dynamic Evangelizer Continue developing).

This task cannot be realized outside of the power of the pastor. And this we do only if the pastor asks us to organize the *Continuity Plan* together with himself.

4. ***Pastoral Action with the youth and children*** tends to fill the gaps that are developed by the ordinary parochial catechist.

5. The tasks of ***planning and revising*** at the end and beginning of the course.

6. Very cautiously, and when it is permitted, we help to ***set in place some charitable and social services***. Here I think, the Vincentian family has some untouched ground that ought to be cultivated with zeal, always respecting the autonomy of the Diocese and looking for the "coordination".

Sometimes, in different ways, the pastors call us to come back and reanimate the communities. In some provinces of Spain, this service is called a "Renewal Mission." To do this task, laity and Sisters ought to be specially chosen.

#### IV Other alternatives

Perhaps you have observed that this plan could be included in a category that in pastoral catechetics would be called "inductive", or "ascending" or "anthropological." However, pastoral wisdom makes us think that in some places and circumstances, it is more convenient to utilize a different plan of a "more kerygmatic kind" or "descending kind". There is no doubt that this second plan could be more effective in some environments. Nevertheless, we want to affirm that, according to our modest experience, these results are not viable in other environments.

If we actualize a plan that is of the kerygmatic style, I judge, nevertheless, that the three key movements of which I have spoken become necessary. That is to say, you ought not prescind from some time dedicated to "person to person encounters," nor of group time nor of the Proclamation/Preaching time.

How to organize these three moments of a mission? How much time should be given to each one of them? I repeat, it will depend on the time that we have at our disposal, of the general environment, and of the human/christian situation that discovers for us the persons that we are going to mission.

In some Provinces, to develop the theological-pastoral plan, they have decided to organize the mission with a week of small group work. This would be a dynamic that begins in the small Christian Community, and then flows out into the large community. These are called "communities of charity" or "family assemblies"...these are put in the first place followed by preaching in the second place...

Well, as a mathematician says, the order of the addition does not alter the answer. If we see that a more "kerygmatic" plan is necessary, it can be varied so that the message to be proclaimed as well as the order of each one of the three moments that I have just described can be achieved. The important thing is to give to the people the nutrition that can be directed and presented in a form that grabs their attention and reaches the people.

In other words, we ought to get away from "absolutizing" or what is worse, *absolutizing ourselves*. The only absolutes in the missions are God, Christ and his Gospel. And in another more human vein, the Church and the human person.

And so, in conclusion with regard to the organization of the mission:

1. It is necessary to maintain the Vincentian principle of *adaptation*. We have to maintain a "loose" spirit so we can *adapt ourselves to the circumstances of place, time, and persons*.

2. We must organize the work of the Mission in conformity with the principle of Salvation History: Jesus *emptying himself* in the Incarnation so that we *have the same sentiments of Jesus who left his Godhead, emptied himself, descended and passed for one among so many Phil. 2,5s*). There's a way for us to do it:

- + Meet and dialogue with the people. (visits, closeness)
- + Preach simply and appropriately.
- + Promote meeting people in small groups.
- + Listen to the Spirit present in the people.

Translation: Arthur Kolinsky, C.M.

## **Seeing and discerning the challenges From st vincent's eyes . . . to ours**

*Emeric Amyot d'Inville, C.M.*

Our Vincentian Month on Parish Missions(1) is structured, as we said at the beginning, around the procedure of "See - Judge - Act", and will be brought to a close through a concluding process, and the drawing up of a document expressing our convictions concerning this ministry today.

At present we are at the first stage: "Seeing". Up to now we have been trying to take a look at the reality surrounding us: the world, the Church, the needs they have, their challenges, our difficulties....I would now like to offer you a reflexion about the way that St Vincent focussed on the social and ecclesial reality surrounding him. Because, as a result of this very focussed look which became aware of the cries of the poor, the signs from God, the challenges to be faced, there was born his missionary and charitable work by way of appropriate and effective response. This will be for us an opportunity to make a critical appraisal of our own way of "seeing", and of the attention which we pay today to the reality which surrounds us. Also of our capacity to perceive the key challenges of our times, and of our manner of being attentive to the signs that God sends to us through events. All this in order better to adapt our missionary action. It is only if the popular mission is centred in on the real needs of our age that it can be an effective instrument for the new evangelization to which the Church is calling us.

This exposé will be essentially focussed on St Vincent unlike most of the other presentations which will have present-day missions as their starting point.. It is good, at the beginning of the Vincentian Month, to plunge back into our roots. I will divide my esposé into three parts:

- I The acquisition of an apostolic outlook.
- II The procedures of Saint Vincent for discerning the challenges of his day.
- III The great challenges which St Vincent faced up to.

### **I The acquisition of an apostolic outlook**

Fr Jean Morin in a fine study of the outlook of St Vincent's which appeared in the book about the fourth centenary of St Vincent, "1581 - 1981"(1), begins with this penetrating remark that in the portraits of St Vincent which have been preserved, "it is doubtless the eyes which are most impressive.. Noticeable in them is a great quality of attention, of observation; one also discovers a suggestion of Gascon mischievousness; above all one finds there a great goodness"

St Vincent is a man of the concrete whose starting point is direct knowledge of events about which he reflects before acting. And so we often find in his letters and conferences the verbs "see" or "look".

To Pope Innocent X whom he is asking on 16 August 1652 to intervene in favour of peace he describes the horrors of the war and he adds: *It is a small thing to hear or read these things; they must be seen and ascertained with one's own eyes* ( IV, 458) (4, 446)

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(1) "Popular Missions" is not a phrase which is used in Great Britain and Ireland; so, in order to translate " Mission Populaire", I have written "Parish Mission", which is a current expression. Translator.

(2)*Histoire d'un regard sur le pauvre*, in "1581 - 1981", published by the "Fiches Vinciennes", Toulouse, 1981, pp 41 to 83. I have besides referred to certain analyses of Fr Morin.

St Vincent did not straight away turn upon the world this compassionate look which we know and which made him undertake a rich diversity of apostolic and charitable works. He acquired it progressively along a complex route. It is only little by little that he learned to "see" in depth the world and the Church with the very eyes of Christ, and to read there how God was calling him through the appeals of the poor and the abandoned. We will briefly trace this evolution. That will help us to stand back and assess the outlook which we direct on to the world and the Church and which determines our manner of situating ourselves there and acting there.

## **1. A poor country lad looking out at the world (1581 -1595)**

Vincent's first view out on to the world was through looking at his parents, his family, his neighbours, his milieu. A poor country boy viewing the other villagers of Pouy. This marked him deeply. He was to admit this later: *I'm a farmer's son who looked after pigs and cows.* (IV, 215) To the Daughters of Charity he said: *I'll speak to you more readily about the virtues of good country girls because of the knowledge I have about this through experience and through nature, being the son of a poor labourer and having lived in the country until the age of fifteen* (IX, 81). This "inside" view of the poor was to characterise him right to the end of his life, in spite of a period of separation.

Thus it was that he experienced for the first time the poverty of living in the midst of small farmers who were needy, and also of humble work in the fields. This early experience, this first viewing by Saint Vincent was formative, and often enough he will refer to it in his writings. He wouldn't hesitate often to take the side of these poor country folk, feeling himself to be one of them. He praised their faith and their courage under trial, setting it in contrast to missionaries who were unwilling to suffer and sought their own ease reluctant to do much work: "It is in these poor people that there continues to exist the true religion and a living faith....poor wine growers, who offer us their work, who count on us to pray for them while they wear themselves out in order to nourish us! We go looking for shade! We don't wish to go out into the sun! We're such great seekers of our ease! At least while giving a mission one is in the church protected from the weather, the heat of the sun and from the rain, to which these poor people are exposed....!" (XI, 201)

In spite of a period of separation from his milieu, as we shall see, he maintained his awareness of belonging to these needy small farmers, having been immersed among them during the 14 years spent in Pouy. He maintained a deep sympathy for them. This basic experience which enabled him to see the poor from the inside certainly contributed to give to his charity its realism, its sense of the concrete needs of the poor for which practical and effective solutions needed to be found.

## 2. Developing another View of the World (1595 - 1617)

Those 14 years spent at Pouy were very enriching, but Saint Vincent didn't advert to this until he decided to devote himself to the poor with a view to evangelising them and serving them. Meanwhile he was to go away from them for about twenty-two years. And that's where a new outlook on the world was to develop thanks to contact with the wealthy, an outlook from which he would subsequently know how to draw great profit in his apostolate.

In 1595 he left his father's farm and the testing life of country folk in order to go and study in the college at Dax, while lodging with the well-off family of M. de Comet, the lawyer from Pouy. He was beginning a long period of his life where he was seeking more and more to draw himself out of his milieu and make a career for himself.

Since the ecclesiastical state was the quickest way for young men from his background to climb the social ladder, they set him out along this way. After a few years of study he was ordained a priest at the age of 19 while continuing his theological studies at the University of Toulouse.

He was out to seek his fortune, but with little success. In 1608, he entered the service of Queen Marguerite de Valois, as one of her chaplains, with the task of distributing her alms. But he was still far from his hoped-for wealth.

Ill- at- ease with his unsuccessful efforts and the lack of direction of his life --he had been a priest for 10 years and had exercised almost no priestly ministry-- he placed himself under the direction of Pierre de Bérulle, the founder of the Oratory in France. He, in November 1611, had him appointed parish priest of Clichy, near Paris, where he was to spend 16 months happily *in the midst of poor country people* (IX,646).

But Vincent left this parish and in 1613, on the recommendation of de Bérulle, entered the powerful de Gondi family as tutor. He had the confidence of Mme de Gondi and was her spiritual director.

Little by little he eased his way into the world of the influential and the rich. In spite of the ambiguity of this procedure -- he was seeking social advancement -- it was for him an opportunity to develop another way of looking at the world. He was seeing things from the viewpoint of the wealthy. In their name he was meeting the poor, distributing the alms of Queen Margot or, in the company of Mme de Gondi, visiting the villagers working on her lands. He was discovering also the generosity of these rich people who were helping the poor with their money and sometimes visiting them. This experience marked him with regard to a large part of his social and pastoral activity, especially in respect of the confraternities of Charity. He was noting the material and moral resources of this milieu.

After 1617 and up to his death, M. Vincent was to devote all his time to the evangelisation and service of the poor. But he also never ceased to keep up contact with the well-off and to seek their collaboration. From 1610 to 1617, Vincent could see the shortcomings of the wealthy but also the values and resources of this milieu which he was to direct towards the service of the poor. One need only think of the numerous Ladies of Charity from among the nobility and the WEALTHY.

### 3. Maturing towards an Apostolic Outlook (1617)

The most fundamental experiences which were to establish definitively his outlook as apostle of the poor took place in the year 1617. Let's pause here a little. It will be a chance for us to go back again into the origins of parish missions.

#### a) *Folleville and the discovery of spiritual misery*

In January 1617 Vincent was with the de Gondis as tutor. He went to Folleville accompanying Mme de Gondi who was visiting the villages situated on her lands.

We know about this episode which is at the origin of the popular missions. Let us recall it in a few words. M. Vincent was called to the bed-side of a dying man in the neighbouring village of Gannes. He hears his confession. It's an event which might appear common-place for a priest. But then the old man makes an admission to Mme de Gondi concerning: *grave sins of his past life*, as Vincent recounts to his missioners. The lady is alarmed: "*Ah!, if this man who was taken for a good person was in a state of damnation, what about others who live worse lives? Ah, M. Vincent, how many souls are being lost! What's the remedy for this?*" (XI,4) Mme de Gondi begged M. Vincent to preach on the theme of general confession in the church in Folleville. And the result was that the people were deeply moved, and crowded along to confession. He was to do the same thing in nearby villages on subsequent days.

M. Vincent was challenged by the massive reaction in the parish of Folleville to his improvised preaching on general confession as much as by the confession of the man at Gannes. Suddenly he had evidence that the poor country people were left abandoned by the Church and that all that was needed was a priest and a sermon in order to arouse in them an unexpected longing for conversion.

*All these good people*, he recounts, *were so touched by God that they were all coming along.....But the crowd was so great that, being unable to cope*, we had to call upon the Jesuits from Amiens (XI,4).

This alarming discovery of the immense spiritual needs of the poor country folk and their abandonment by the Church was for him the revelation of a challenge, and a powerful appeal. For the future he wanted to continue the apostolate which he had so well begun in Folleville.

His focus was now no longer on himself, on his social success, on his family. It was definitively directed to the poor country people and their spiritual needs. And that is why, a few months after the experience at Folleville, he secretly went away from the de Gondis and from any idea of personal promotion. He travelled to Châtillon in order to be free from every constraint so as to preach and administer the sacraments. Châtillon was going to reveal to him another dimension to his vocation.

#### b) *Châtillon and the rediscovery of material misery*

M. Vincent arrived on 1st August 1617 in Châtillon, a rural parish of 2000 inhabitants and very run-down. Three weeks after his arrival there took place the second event which

was to challenge him as at Folleville and through which God was again going to speak to him. He would discover what was to become one of the constituents of the missionary apostolate: service of the poor through the Confraternity of Charity.

We are aware of what took place. Just before preaching, *a message was brought to me*, he recounts, *that there was a poor man who was sick and very badly housed in a wretched barn.....Greatly moved with compassion, I strongly urged that he should be helped, and with such feeling that all the women were touched* (IX,423). Without delay they all off went at the same time bringing him help. In order to remedy this inefficiency, due to lack of organisation in their generosity, Saint Vincent set them up as a Confraternity of Charity to help the poor who *have often suffered owing more to lack of order in assisting them rather than lack of charitable people* (First Rule of the confraternity of Charity of Châtillon, XIII, 423).

In Châtillon, M. Vincent discovered two facts which would profoundly mark his action in the future:

- 1) Effective intervention for improving conditions in the lives of the poor must go hand- in-hand with evangelisation. They cannot be separated.
- 2) The essential place of the laity, their irreplaceable role both at the level of evangelisation and that of material service and promotion of the poor.

In Folleville, M. Vincent had been struck by the *spiritual* misery of the poor who were abandoned by the Church, and by priests. In Châtillon he was challenged by the *material* misery of the poor who were abandoned by society, as well as by the Church. The Church is directly concerned in this question and cannot close itself off into the purely spiritual dimension of ministry. For the future there would constantly come to his lips the two adverbs: *spiritually* and *corporally*, which became for him inseparable and which were found in the very first rule of the Confraternity of Charity of Châtillon: a few women of the village *agreed to give spiritual and corporal assistance to those in the town* (XIII, 423). This regulation of M. Vincent's first foundation already contained the seed of everything which was subsequently to characterise his charitable and social action. In it could be found especially his astonishing organising ability as well as his respect for the worth of the poor person who deserves to be treated with dignity.

This year 1617 was therefore decisive for Saint Vincent. At the beginning of January he was still hesitant about what direction to give to his life. And now he had arrived at the decision to devote the rest of his life to the evangelisation and the material support of the poor whose real needs he had been able to discern as a result of the basic experiences of Folleville and Châtillon.

#### **4 What is My Outlook on the World?**

Such was, in broad outline, the story of Saint Vincent's outlook with its stages and its maturing. We are now going to reflect for a moment on our own personal outlook and on its evolution.

a. *The initial outlook inherited from within the family circle.* Saint Vincent, like each of us inherited from his family circle a certain way of looking at the world. He hadn't therefore chosen it. This outlook was to remain fundamental for him even if it was to be completed by other subsequent ways of looking. Let us think back for a moment on the outlook which is special to each one of us and which was formed in the family and social circle of our first years. It constitutes generally a formative influence where we have learned to view things from a particular angle. It is sometimes a outlook which needs to be changed because it has suffered so much from the limitations and prejudices of a particular background. Certainly it still leaves its imprint on us today. We need to be aware of it.

b. *Then there comes another outlook which completes it.* Saint Vincent had later distanced himself from his milieu in order to try and enter another, in an effort to forge a career. However, in spite of the ambiguity of his procedure, this allowed him to discover another view-point on the world, that of the upper classes. He undoubtedly saw their faults, but he also became aware of their material and moral resources and of their generosity. He was able to understand them, speak to them and obtain their collaboration in the service of the poor. It is good for us to notice the other viewpoints from which, as a result of our subsequent experiences, we looked at the world, and which have contributed to form our present outlook on it.

c. *A basic outlook* Folleville and Châtillon were definitive experiences for Saint Vincent. In the course of these, taking on an apostolic outlook, he focussed his view definitively on the poor with their spiritual and material needs. Such was the viewpoint from which he was in future to look at the world and understand it. Each of us individually can ask ourselves what is today the basic viewpoint from which we view the world, and if this is truly Vincentian.

Saint Vincent developed an apostolic outlook which enabled him to grasp the great challenges of his day and which directed him towards practical and effective solutions. By reflecting on his experience we can ask ourselves through what stages did he pass in order to identify the challenges.

## **II Saint Vincent's Procedure for Discerning the Challenges of his Time**

Becoming sensitive to the challenges of an era is a complex process, taking place at several levels. It is far from being purely intellectual. Saint Vincent didn't begin by reading learned reports, of which however he knew the usefulness as well as the limits, as we see in his already quoted letter to Pope Innocent X: *It is a small thing to hear or read these things; they must be seen and ascertained with one's own eyes* (IV, 458). Even if nowadays research and reports can be very useful they are not sufficient to make us notice the challenges of today's world or at least they do not constitute stage one.. What was Saint Vincent's stages of procedure, and what might be ours?

### **1 To encounter certain challenging experiences**

Let us reflect on what was decisive for Saint Vincent in his sensitivity to the great challenges of his day. It ought to be said at the start that for several years the material and spiritual misery of the poor, although he was aware of it from close quarters, had not

constituted for him a challenge. He had been immersed in poverty for the first fourteen years of his life and he suffered from it. Then he wished to get away from it for twenty-two years. But this lived experience of poverty nevertheless had not for him been transformed into awareness of a challenge to be met. Besides, during all these years, he didn't try to remedy it, but only to get away from it, he and his family. The reason for this is that he was still centred on himself and on his immediate family as extensions of himself.

In order to become aware of the challenges of his times Saint Vincent would have to undergo certain powerful experiences which would entail the blending of: a) certain important events, and b) an opening of the heart to be sensitive to them, an opening to the neighbour as well as to God and to what God wanted of him. His heart would then quicken, being profoundly touched. He would be *moved with great compassion* in the face of this misery (IX, 209), as he said on several occasions. And he would at the same time feel himself personally challenged, and called to do something which would help. The result was that the course of his life was changed. In fact, in the face of all corporal and spiritual suffering, he would be captivated by the very charity of Christ who lived in him and "worked on" his heart.

*Charity, he said to his Missioners, makes us unable to see the neighbour suffer without suffering with him, to see him weep and not weep with him. It is an act of love which makes us enter into the hearts and feelings of each other. Far removed is it from those who feel no compassion for the afflicted or the suffering poor. Ah! how tender of heart the Son of God was. He is called to visit Lazarus and he goes.....He weeps with them, so tender and compassionate is he. It was this tenderness which caused him to come down from heaven, seeing people excluded from his glory. He was touched by their misfortune (XII, 270).* We know how, in the case of Saint Vincent, this love would not be merely affective but very effective indeed, practical, active and inventive in relieving any suffering and for bringing the good news of salvation.

It is this openness of the heart to the neighbour and to God which enabled him to read the meaning of events and to see God's call in them. He would then understand the real challenges facing society and the Church, and at the same time would discover that he was capable of taking action with regard to them in order to bring about an effective solution. These basic experiences which vigorously challenged Saint Vincent's conscience were principally :

- the meeting with the countryman from Gannes and the subsequent very successful missions;
- the encounter with the poor invalid at Châtillon and the formation of the first Confraternity of Charity; to which one could add:
- the encounter with the Protestant from Marchais who threw it in his face that the Catholic church cannot be led by the Holy Spirit since in it the poor are abandoned; and then a year later the conversion of this same Protestant when he sees in the course of a mission that the poor are evangelized.

After these basic experiences Saint Vincent was always attentive to the signs from God who ceaselessly speaks anew through events. The encounter with new forms of poverty would be for him pressing calls to take up the challenge by seeking to provide solutions through his diverse foundations: the Confraternities of Charity, the Congregation of the Mission, and the Daughters of Charity. Thus, meeting with the galley-slaves, the sick in hospital, the abandoned children, the aged, the war-refugees, the Catholics persecuted in Ireland or in the Hebrides, etc.

Coming to another stage, the re-reading of the experience in the light of the word of God would enable Saint Vincent to move deeper into his understanding of reality and to confirm his discernment of the calls which God was expressing there. That will be my second point.

## 2 Re-reading the Event in the Light of God's Word.

a. It is in a re-reading of the Gannes-Folleville event in the light of the Gospel, especially Luke 4, 17-22, that he understands the depth of the challenge which is thrown at him. This is in line with the mission of Jesus who, returning to Nazareth at the start of his public life, reads out in the synagogue a text of the prophet Isaiah: "*The spirit of the Lord has been given to me for he has anointed me to bring the good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord's year of favour.*" Jesus rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the assistant and sat down. And all eyes in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to speak to them: "*This text is being fulfilled today even as you listen.*"

After the experience of Folleville, this text of the Gospel affirming that Jesus came to evangelise the poor confirmed Saint Vincent in his call to evangelise them. He sees clearly that announcing the good news to the poor puts him at the heart of the Gospel and in line with the mission of Jesus. This is indeed the challenge which God asks him to take up after the example of Jesus. For the future he will have his eyes and his heart wide open to welcome and discern the various spiritual needs of the poor so as to respond to them.

b. Another Gospel text would help Saint Vincent to re-read and understand in depth the Châtillon event and the foundation of the first Confraternity of Charity. It would at the same time enable him to focus more deeply on the poor to the extent of seeing there the presence of Christ himself. It is the parable of the Last Judgment (Mt 25, 31-46): "*Then the King will say to those on his right hand : Come, you whom my Father has blessed..... for I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you made me welcome; naked and you clothed me, sick and you visited me.....I tell you solemnly, in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine , you did it to me.*" This text throws a clear light on the Châtillon event and gives him confirmation of his call to relieve all suffering, since anyway, it is Jesus whom one meets and helps in the person of the poor and the suffering.

And so Saint Vincent would be able to say: *Turn the medal and you will see through the light of faith that the Son of God who wished to be poor is represented for us by these poor people....Lord! how beautiful to see the poor if we consider them in God and in the esteem which Jesus showed them!* (XI, 32)

## 3 And now what about ourselves?

What are the challenging experiences which I have met and which opened my eyes to today's great challenges with regard to evangelisation? Has the word of God helped me to understand them more deeply? What are my key texts?

### III The great challenges to which Saint Vincent responded

Saint Vincent was able to involve himself and his various foundations (Confraternities of Charity, Congregation of the Mission and Daughters of Charity) in appropriate apostolic action which had a profound effect on the social and ecclesial life of his time because he could see and discern clearly the challenges of his times and the call of God involved in these. He almost changed the face of the Church, Henri de Maupas du Tour was to say in the homily at Saint Vincent's funeral. If we wish today to get to grips with our world we must, like Saint Vincent, know how to view and understand situations in their context and distinguish what exactly is at stake and what challenges need to be met. I am now going to evoke briefly 4 of the biggest challenges which Saint Vincent discerned and which are linked to missions. That will be able to help and stimulate us in seeking those of our own time and our own region of the world.

#### 1 Challenge of the spiritual misery of the poor country people

The country people are perishing with hunger for the word of God according to Saint Vincent's beautiful and touching phrase. He became aware of this misery in Folleville.

a. He discovered also that *the Church has abandoned them: those living in the towns of this country, he wrote, have the help of plenty of doctors of theology and religious....it is only the poor country people who alone are left as if abandoned* (Foundation Contract, XIII, 198).

That Protestant whom Saint Vincent met at Marchais in 1621 was right; he made the objection: *One sees the Catholics of the countryside abandoned to vicious and ignorant pastors, without being instructed in their duties, with most of them not even knowing what is the christian religion; and on the other hand one sees the towns full of priests and monks who are doing nothing; and in Paris perhaps there are ten thousand who however leave these poor country people in this dreadful ignorance which causes them to be lost* (XI, 34). This same Protestant was to return to the Catholic church where he was to see, one year later, in the course of a mission given by Saint Vincent, that the poor were being evangelised.

b. The poor country people are in *a profound ignorance of their faith*, according to Saint Vincent who says with compassion: *The poor people coming to confession are so gross, so ignorant, so obtuse, not to say so animal! They don't know how many gods there are, or how many persons in God. Get them to repeat it fifty times and you'll find that in the end they're as ignoraant as at the start* (XIII, 305).

The situation is quite serious more or less all over Europe. Thus at Niolo in Corsica, Etienne Blatiron writes: *We found almost no other traces of the faith except that they said they had been baptised; and there were a few churches, but badly kept. They were in such ignorance about their salvation that it was hard to find a hundred people who knew the commandments of God and the Apostles' Creed. Asking them if there is a God or if there are several, and which of the divine persons became man for us was like talking Arabic* (IV, 412). In the Islands of the Hebrides Dermot Duggan thus described the situation in Eigg and Canna: *God has converted eight or nine hundred people who were so poorly instructed in matters concerning our religion that there wern't fifteen who knew any of the mysteries of the christian faith....I found thirty or forty people aged seventy, eighty and a hundred or more who hadn't received holy baptism* (IV, 516). Mission reports provide abundant descriptions

of this profound ignorance of the country people. Saint Vincent believed that their eternal salvation was in danger.

c. In addition, being badly instructed in their faith, *many became Protestants*. This religion was dominant in northern Europe. It continued to spread into France where the priests were not very competent or caring about giving good spiritual teaching to their parishoners. So people began to accept what was said by Protestant ministers who were often zealous and explained the gospel to them. Speaking of Champigny near Richelieu, Saint Vincent wrote: *O Father, what spiritual needs there are in that area, where there are many heretics, because, so they say, they haven't heard God spoken of in the Catholic churches!* (I, 514)

The great remedy invented by saint Vincent would be, as we know, parish missions. The missionaries went to meet the abandoned rural populations and offered them a basic catechesis adapted to their level in which the principal aspects of the faith were proclaimed. They paid special attention to the mysteries of the Trinity, the Incarnation and the Eucharist which Saint Vincent had represented on the front of the Common Rules. It was this faith proclamation through the "catechism classes" during missions which in Saint Vincent's eyes was most useful to the people. We will have occasion to come back to that on another day.

## **2 The challenge from behaviour which is at variance with the gospel**

Moral disorders in personal, family and social life were often very prevalent among christians; their style of living was far from the gospel. This gap between a professed christian faith and a life which contradicted the gospel was a challenge which Saint Vincent and his missionaries clearly discerned and to which they would try to bring a solution in the course of missions. I shall take principally the example of interpersonal relations.

a *Disrupted interpersonal relationships*. Disunity between people in whatever form was a frequent evil in families and in village or parish communities. It is interesting to note that Saint Vincent and his missionaries were very aware of this since it represents a clear contradiction of the gospel message given to us by Jesus. It would be one of the principal aims of the missions to try to remedy this.

We find in mission reports very numerous descriptions of these broken relationships and of the missionaries' attempts to repair them in order to build up a family, or village or parish community where there would exist a practical charity worthy of true christians.

Deep-rooted hatred, revenge, unjust taking of other people's property, and lawsuits were frequent everywhere and were poisoning the life of families and villages. Let's cite just one example from among the worst, taken from the account of a mission at Niolo in Corsica: *vengeance was so rife that no sooner had children learned to walk and to talk than they were taught how to seek vengeance at the slightest offence. It was useless to preach the contrary to them because the example of their ancestors and the bad advice of their own relatives regarding to this vice were so deeply rooted in their minds that they were incapable of accepting any opinion to the contrary* (IV, 412).

Faced with this type of problem the missionaries would do what the Common Rules states about taking as an objective during the missions *to settle differences and lawsuits* (C.R. 2). In fact: *We have been established*, Saint Vincent used to say, *to reconcile people with God and people with one another*.

The missionaries were to give themselves with zeal to this interpersonal and communitarian ministry of reconciliation. They would do it by preaching forcefully on the subject and by making much personal contact with the people concerned so that they might become reconciled and forgive one another and might restore ill-gotten goods. Let's give one example from among very many, drawn from the Niolo missions account: *Finally, on the eve of the general Communion, I was coming to the close of the sermon, after exhorting the people once again to forgiveness, God inspired me to take in hand the crucifix I was wearing and to say to them that anyone who was willing to forgive should come and kiss it. Then I invited them to do so in the name of Our Lord, who was stretching forth His arms to them saying that those who kissed that crucifix would be giving a sign that they were willing to forgive and were ready to be reconciled with their enemies. (in fact nobody budged but a reformed Franciscan who was in the church called upon them again). Then a parish priest whose nephew had been killed and the murderer was present at the sermon came to prostrate himself on the ground and asked to kiss the crucifix. At the same time he said in a loud voice: "Let a certain person (his nephew's murderer) come forward so that I can embrace him". When this was done another priest did the same with regard to some of his enemies who were present. These two were followed by a throng of others, so much so that for the space of an hour and a half, we saw nothing but reconciliations and embraces. For greater assurance the most important matters were put in writing and authenticated by a notary public. The next day --- Communion Day --- a general reconciliation took place. After the people had asked pardon of God, they asked it also of their pastors and vice-versa; it was all very edifying....(IV, 415)*

It is interesting to note that above and beyond an indispensable effort towards individual conversion, the mission was the occasion of a whole drive to build up a communitarian life of fraternal charity and peace which should be a gospel sign at the level of the family, the village and the parish. Because, as Saint Vincent said, in a conference to missionaries: *I must love my neighbour as the image of God and the object of his love, and likewise bring it about that people should love their Creator who knows and recognises them as his brothers and has saved them ;and that, with a mutual charity they should love one another for the love of God who has so loved them as to deliver his own Son to death....(XII, 262 - 263). Quite definitely the whole mission consists in that: relationships based on love!*

b *Other challenges* By way of exemplifying the work of converting the day-to-day living of people which takes place during missions let's briefly mention: concubinage and irregular unions. They are frequent more or less everywhere and damage the constitution of true christian families. This subject was dealt with in preaching. The missionaries would try to bring those whose situation was amenable into a true religious marriage and would try to persuade others to separate. Other moral disorders ought to be mentioned which the missionaries tried to remedy: blasphemies, excesses of the carnival, drunkenness, etc.

Let's conclude this point by saying that the mission wished to offer a way towards a practical turning of their lives back to the gospel. As well as the "Catechism Lessons" which deal with the principal aspects of the faith, the missionaries each day gave what they called a "preaching", that is to say a sermon with a moral purpose, envisaging the different concrete areas of the lives of the people so as to lead them to renounce sin and embrace the corresponding virtues of their state. The results would often be impressive, securing astonishing reformations of life: reconciliations between enemies, mutual forgiveness, restitution of property, regularisation of unions, etc.

### 3 The Challenge of Material Poverty

a. Saint Vincent took up in Châtillon the challenge of *permanent material poverty*, involving principally the sick poor who lived in the village and he gave it a first response by setting up a Confraternity of Charity which would be followed by numerous others. He would also discover other permanent poverties : the sick in hospitals, abandoned children, old people, unemployed adults, orphans, prisoners, slaves in Barbary, and others besides. His various foundations would adapt themselves to respond to these needs.

In villages where missions had been given, in order to reply to daily and permanent misery especially among the sick poor he wished that after each mission a Confraternity of Charity should be set up composed of christian parishioners (generally women in fact), to take care of the poor in that place. Indeed, to establish the Confraternity of Charity (C.R. 2) was one of the aims of the missions mentioned by the Common Rules. Many mission accounts state that the Confraternity had been set up at the end of the mission, sometimes thanks to a Daughter of Charity who had been sent expressly for that (SV I, 457).

b. In addition to this permanent daily misery, already bad enough, there was *an exceptional misery* provoked by "extraordinary" phenomena which settled in and lasted several years : the wars with their train of murders, brigandage and famines, epidemics like the plague, etc. We find a very evocative picture of this in his letter of 16 August 1652 to Pope Innocent X whom he asks to intervene in favour of peace. *The royal house is divided by dissensions; the people are split into various factions; cities and provinces are ruined by civil wars; farms, cantons and towns are destroyed, ruined and burned. The farmers cannot harvest what they have sown and no longer plant anything for the coming years. Soldiers do as they please; the people are exposed not only to their thefts and pillaging, but also to murder and all kinds of torture. Most of the country people are perishing of starvation if not by the sword...*(IV, 458)

Saint Vincent would launch the Ladies of Charity, the Daughters of Charity and the missionaries into efforts to remedy all these miseries. He would send them into Champagne, Lorraine, Picardy, and the war-stricken Paris region. He got food distributed, nourishing tens of thousands of poor in Paris and the provinces. He provided agricultural implements and seeds to enable people to return to work and themselves take care of their needs. He always linked evangelisation to the giving of material aid, asking the missionaries to preach missions while they were organising relief aid.

Let's cite another great challenge which anyway is closely linked to the mission's:

### 4 Challenge of Poor Quality Clergy

Saint Vincent saw clearly that the clergy of his day, often lacking a true vocation, badly formed and with lax morals were incapable of looking after the ordinary spiritual needs of the people, especially in the country, as well as assuring a follow-up to the missions. A bishop, in a letter to Saint Vincent, complained of *the large and inexplicable number of ignorant and lax priests who compose my clergy and who can't be corrected either by word or by example. I'm horrified when I think that in my diocese there are almost seven thousand drunk or unchaste priests who daily mount the altar steps and who have no*

*vocation* (II, 428-429). Saint Vincent knew the problem well for it is likely he was one of these priests who, without living a scandalous life, had progressed towards the priesthood without a vocation in order to ascend the social scale.

a. But Saint Vincent is also faced with *the problem of follow-up to the missions*. Often the deplorable state of the clergy ran the risk of compromising the fruit of the missions., since good priests are needed to ensure development after the missionaries have gone away. Saint Vincent explains : *Now working for the salvation of the poor country people is central to our vocation and all the rest is only accessory; for we would have never got involved in the ordinations, the ecclesiastical seminaries if we hadn't judged that that was necessary to maintain the people and preserve the fruit brought about by the missions when there are good ecclesiastics, imitating in that the great conquerors who leave garrisons in the places they capture, for fear of losing what they have acquired with such effort* (XI, 133).

Saint Vincent would, as we know, invent new structures for forming good priests: ordination retreats, Tuesday conferences, and seminaries. But parish missions would also make a specific contribution to remedying this problem.

b *Help given to the clergy through the missions*

1) It was the very fact of following *the mission itself* with their parishioners that helped them. Indeed it can be seen from mission reports that many priests were renewed in their personal lives and in their priestly ministry during the mission. Some were reconciled with their parishioners as we saw for example at Niolo. Others were renewed in their ministry as is recounted in the same mission report: *the priests firmly promised to teach the catechism lessons and to become more careful of their duties* (IV, 417).

2) It was the foundation, towards the end of the mission, of *a clergy conference* after the model of the Tuesday conferences initiated by Saint Vincent at Paris. *Saint Vincent, Abelly* says, *wished that his missionaries should be involved, as they are, throughout the mission in rendering all the services they could to the clergy of the places where they were working, especially by means of spiritual conferences in which they treated with them concerning the obligations of their state, the faults they should most avoid, the virtues they are obliged to practise and which are most proper and suitable, and other similar subjects* (Abelly I, 279).

The missionaries could also propose to the priests of the parishes in an area which had received missions to gather together and under their direction make *a retreat* in their house. Mission reports sometimes tell of spectacular cases of conversion of priests and more frequently of priests committing themselves to take zealous care of their parishes.

One could mention still other challenges which Saint Vincent had perceived and had taken up (unworthy bishops, Jansenism, etc.). We have seen those most directly connected with our theme of popular missions. And so we shall stop here. It is now time to conclude our remarks by analysing what one might call the "Vincentian procedures" which lay at the root of the rich fruitfulness of Saint Vincent's ministry.

## Conclusion

This brief presentation of the principal challenges which Saint Vincent picked up with great clear-sightedness and this glimpse of the responses which he brought through the parish missions are sufficient to enable us to understand how Saint Vincent truly got to grips with

the society and the Church of his time and why he had such a real impact that he had "almost changed the face of the Church".

His method of proceeding could be summed up thus:

- viewing reality with the eyes of an apostle and discerning the true needs of those who were poorest and most abandoned
- confronting this and seeking responses with inventiveness, courage and confidence in God
- diversifying, ceaselessly adapting and gearing down his action, seeking numerous collaborations: priests, consecrated women, and laity;
- simultaneously pushing forward evangelisation and assistance or promotion of the poor, giving priority now to one, now to the other, but always linking them closely;

A criticism which one sometimes hears about parish missions today is that they limit themselves to being a pious exercise or a nice celebration for Christians, but having no tomorrow. This is because in certain places the priests see them as such, even if this is incorrect, and they demand nothing more and missions are frozen out. It seems to me that if we want our present-day ministry of parish missions to really get to grips with our times we must draw inspiration from the Vincentian procedures which we have just focussed on. It would therefore be helpful for us to continue our reflexions concerning our way of a) perceiving the big challenges of today, discerning particularly the needs of the poorest and most abandoned of our times, b) facing these by seeking suitable and effective solutions with regard to assistance and evangelisation.

As missionaries we ought to be pioneers of evangelisation. We cannot remain satisfied with walking in the steps of our predecessors, for the world is changing (even if we cannot of course belittle the experiences of the past). If we were to fail to identify today's challenges and to face them with inventiveness and a spirit of faith, we would be staying at the edge of the real problems of the Church, and parish missions would be insignificant and without real impact.

However, if we are here, it's because we believe that parish missions are capable of being a response, albeit partial, but an effective and appropriate response to the true problems of the Church and of our present-day world. It is because we believe that in actualising the Vincentian charism of evangelisation and service of today's most abandoned people the parish mission can contribute effectively and in a concrete way to the new evangelisation which our world needs. This is also what is at stake concerning our reflexions here and the very reason for this Vincentian Month.

Stanislaus Brindley CM, Translator

# **The expectations of a bishop with regard to popular missions**

*P. Dosado Jesse, C.M.*

Fellow Workers in St. Vincent:

## **Introduction**

May I first quote from the letter of Fr. Emeric: “We would like you to tell us, as a bishop, the unique contribution you expect from the popular missions for evangelization in your diocese and how they can be structured with the ordinary pastorate.”

This necessitates that I say something about my diocese.

When I arrived in it in 1981, I found it already had a thrust collegially arrived at two years before: *Solidarity with the Poor in the Formation/Creation of Basic Ecclesial Communities*.

This thrust will have some implications for the framework on which to structure the popular missions. And so, allow me to elaborate on it.

## **Solidarity with the Poor**

Solidarity with the poor, among other things, would mean looking at our situation from the view point of the poor, the viewpoint of our Lord.

Solidarity with the poor implies to be present with the poor in their suffering. It means taking a stand with the poor as Jesus did.

It also demands a conversion by both priest and people in the understanding of priestly ministry: service of people, the mediation of God's love by affirming people in their humanity.

This also calls for ministerial restructuring: from being in control to being the coordinator, facilitator of the various communities of people that exist within the territory we refer to as a parish.

It also puts emphasis on the imperative of facilitating the continuous growth of these communities in order to help them become life-giving communities within the parish, diocese and the wider church.

This shift in structure makes central the most basic life-form of the local church - the individual *basic ecclesial community*.



## **Basic Ecclesial Communities**

Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) are the Church itself at grassroots level or at the "base" understood as going directly to the "basis" of our faith - Jesus Christ, the Gospel, the Holy Spirit.

- basic, because its members are *for the most part* on the bottom rung of the social ladder: the poor, the tenants, the unemployed, the marginalized, and so on;
- basic in the communitarian sense, where one feels committed to the good of the other: a natural grouping of people meeting together to reflect on their life-situation in the light of the Word of God, to celebrate it in a way that has meaning for them and to work for its transformation.

At the most basic level of BECs, it would demand the creation of programs that facilitate a deeper sense of community, a willingness to share resources, a leadership structure for on-going formation for both leaders and members.

At the parish level it would demand the building up of a parish core team to facilitate and support the on-going in-service and coordination of the BECs.

At the diocesan level it would demand a program of formation and a coordinated support system for local community leaders and people.

## **Singular Contribution of Popular Missions**

As a Bishop, then, of a diocese with such a thrust, I would expect the popular missions to orient the BECs towards a renewed appreciation for these three interrelated areas: Catechesis, Social Apostolate, and Worship.

This should be done in such a way that the BECs would be inspired and motivated to follow them up with their own structures of responsibilities.

But already at the evangelization through the popular missions they should be given some ideas about these areas.

### Renewed catechesis

The first area of a renewed evangelization through the popular missions is a *renewed catechesis*. Not enough of the people are being catechized or are being catechized enough.

## **Christo-centric**

This Catechesis must be *Christ-centered*. There is no compromising the centrality and primacy of Christ. Everything -the Blessed Virgin Mary, the saints, the sacraments, devotions, etc., all of which are esteemed by my people- must be taught in relation to Christ.

## **Rooted in the Word of God**

If it is to be Christ-centered, catechesis must be *rooted in the Word of God*. Nothing and no one speaks better of the Incarnate Word of God than the scriptural Word of God. The Bible must once again become the primary catechetical book.

### **Authentically Filipino**

Catechesis must also be authentically *Filipino*. It must be inculturated so that both the means of transmission of the message and the resources for assimilating, it are Filipino.

This inculturation of catechesis is a very necessary and urgent task. Without such an inculturation, either the Christian message remains alien to the Filipino, or the Filipino in accepting it risks being alienated from his culture.

### **Systematic**

Finally, catechesis must be *systematic*, i.e., it must present in an ordered and programmed way the whole of the Good News from the Bible and Sacred Tradition, and as taught by the Church -- without distortion or diminution, but always taking into account the circumstances of the catechized.

This systematic catechesis must highlight the basics of Catholic belief and practice, and include as an integral part the social doctrine of the Church.

## **Renewed social apostolate**

The second area of a renewed evangelization is a renewed *social apostolate*. The Church sees clearly now that Christian social action, i.e., action carried out by the Church and its members to promote human development, justice in society, and peace, is not only pre-evangelization, but is a task without which evangelization is not complete.

"Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us as a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel."

## **Renewed worship**

The third area of a renewed evangelization through the popular missions is *worship*. In the Philippines worship has, unfortunately, been often separated from the totality of life. The liturgy is not seen as the source and apex of the Church's life. Rather, the liturgy is seen as a department of life without an intimate connection with social, economic and political life.

## **Renewal of Prayer Life**

Part of this renewal of the worship life of our people is the renewal of the life of prayer. We should aim at the growth of prayer groups, charismatic groups, and religious movements. It would be good to see people congregate in gatherings in order to pray.

This prayer life needs to be further promoted. It is important to form people who can be teachers to others in prayer.

## **Renewal of Popular Piety**

Renewal of Prayer Life will mean the use of *popular religious practices*. Filipino Catholic popular religious practices are rich in values. They manifest a thirst for God and make people capable of generosity and sacrifice in the manifestation of their faith.

But these popular religious practices must be fostered in such a way that they do not become distortions of religion or remain at the level of forms of worship, but become rather true expressions of faith.

We must make sure that devotions to the Blessed Virgin Mary and the other saints are seen in relationship with, and in subordination to, Christ, the one Mediator between God and humankind. It seems that in practice the saints and the Blessed Virgin Mary occupy the attention of many of the simple faithful more than Christ does.

## **Liturgical Renewal**

Big steps have already been taken to promote liturgical renewal in the Philippines so that the participation of the faithful in sacramental celebrations may be informed, active, full and communitarian. But much still needs to be done, especially in the field of liturgical education.

Among the more vital areas of renewal are: *pre-sacramental catechesis*, so that no sacrament is administered without first instructing the participants on the meaning of the sacraments they are to receive. This is especially needed for the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Marriage.

## **The renewal of the sacrament of Penance**

This sacrament which is a celebration of God's mercy, has often been neglected both by priests and lay people. The pastors and faithful have to be educated to see in this sacrament an encounter with the Lord who reconciles us to himself and to his people.

Priests should make themselves available for this sacrament and seek creatively for ways to remedy the dangers of routine in the celebration of this sacrament. The creative use of public penitential celebrations will greatly help in the appreciation of this sacrament.

### **The inter-relatedness of these areas**

It must be stressed that no true renewal, can happen in one area (e.g., catechesis), in isolation from the other two areas. Any genuine renewal must be holistic, i.e., it must affect all three areas in their inter-relationship.

However, the most basic area of renewal, and the one that must receive first priority is catechesis. Without education towards maturity in the faith, the social apostolate will become activism and will fall prey to the temptations of unchristian ideologies. Without catechesis, worship will degenerate into formalism and will slide into superstition and a magical mentality.

On the other hand, catechesis without the social apostolate will lack the power of Christian witness and transformation. And without worship, catechesis will become indoctrination.

Finally, the social apostolate without worship will lose its source of strength, while worship without the social apostolate will turn into worship divorced from life.

Having identified the areas of renewed evangelization through popular missions, I shall now outline its characteristics.

### **Characteristics of renewed evangelization**

This renewed evangelization should be characterized by the clarity of its goals, and by a new fervor, new methods, and new expressions.

### **The Goals of Evangelization**

Renewed evangelization must aim first of all at the formation of Catholics in an integral spirituality.

Evangelization must also seek to build up the Church, so that it becomes a people made one with the unity of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, a community of Christ's disciples, a visible mystery of communion and mission, and a sacrament, in Christ, of universal salvation.

Evangelization does not stop at the building of the Church. It seeks to transform the whole fabric of society according to the values of the Kingdom and of Christ and to promote total human development, integral liberation, justice in society and the cause of peace.

### **New Methods**

The goals of the new evangelization in the Philippines can be pursued only with *new methods*, new in the sense that there is a renewed emphasis on them.

One aspect of the new methodology is the participative approach. It will call on everyone without exception to participate.

In catechesis people have to be consistently led to relate Christian truth to their real lives. Liturgy itself must aim at the full participation of the people. And the social apostolate must stimulate its beneficiaries to participate in their own development, in the struggle for justice, and in the work of peace.

Another aspect of the new methodology is the team approach to evangelizing. Individuals and groups band together to achieve their goals in the growing recognition of the existence of their own charisms and the charisms of others.

### **New Fervor**

Such a participative approach is possible only if a *new fervor* is infused into all the members of the Christian community. Indeed, we are called to proclaim the Good News together, with the fervor of the saints, with an enthusiasm similar to that of the first disciples.

## **New Expressions**

This new fervor and new method will demand *new expressions*. Today there are tremendous possibilities of transmitting the Good News through the *means of social communication*.

"New expressions" will also mean the use of symbols and languages understood by the people, expressions and words which touch their minds, hearts and souls.

We must also look into the culture of our people in order to discover which cultural expressions and symbols enter effectively and appeal to their hearts.

Let me end by saying that I am very grateful to the Vincentians for allowing me to join this Vincentian Month on the theme of the Popular Missions. Already in June of last year, in our yearly retreat my priests articulated in our Vision-Mission the setting up of a Diocesan Mission Team.

And I also anticipate my gratitude to all of you for the many lessons I am sure I shall learn from all of you during this month. All this shall be very helpful to me.

Thank you very much and God bless you.

Jesse Dosado, C.M.

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# Missionaries following christ the evangelizer of the poor (1)

Raymond Facelina CM

## Introduction

"We are possessed with a certain confidence about which we wish to speak to you. It is not a matter of denying the crisis going through our Church, not even our Church in France. But along with you as we meet you day after day we are ready to meet the challenges confronting us.

The principal challenge is that of proclaiming Christ. Along with yourselves, it is our task to announce Christ and to make the world a more humane place. That's why we are calling on you to come close to Him. And for you first of all to discover, in all freedom, through a reading of the Word of God and through prayer, the call which is being addressed to you. No announcing of the Gospel takes place without a profound spiritual renewal. That is why I am pointing to your responsibilities in the Church. You are the Church. Don't just look at it from the outside. You yourselves have been given the responsibilities".(2)

It is the bishops of France who are thus expressing themselves. I have focussed on this passage of their message directed to the young Catholics invited to the World Youth Days of 1997. Why? It seems to me to correspond with our preoccupation as Vincentians with the challenges of the world and our desire to respond to them at the dawn of the Twenty-First Century. I draw your attention to the key phrase: "*The principal challenge is how to proclaim Christ today.*"

This takes us to the heart of the themes of our General Assemblies:

that of the DCs: inculturation

that of the CMs: the Vincentian family and the challenges of the world.

Here we are right into our subject: *Popular Missions* (Parish Missions)

I'd like to share with you some convictions. They relate to the *spirit* which in my view ought to animate Vincentians in their lives and in their actions today, in the world and in the Church. And so I divide my remarks in to two parts:

1st part : Missionaries following Christ, the evangelizer of the poor (today's topic)

2nd part : What sort of Church to build? (topic for tomorrow)

This morning I propose to you the following procedure:

- 1) The distinctive approach taken by Jesus Christ, according to St Vincent;
- 2) A particular relationship with the poor.

First of all, something evident. Vincentians do not constitute a race apart, nor a category classified as "specialists" in mission and in charity. Vincentians are men, women, Christians. Also, Vincentians are not alone, nor are they the only ones to devote themselves to mission, to parish missions, to the poor, to the sick, to the excluded. Finally Vincentians are, in the main, men and women, young and less young when they are seen to include consecrated laity like the Daughters of Charity and the Brothers of the Mission, along with priests and religious. The Vincentian family with its different branches is in the Church and in the world of today. No need to argue about that.

They are in the world along with everybody else and if they are not there....well, what's wrong? For if the Vincentians are not in the world it's because they have understood nothing about their election , their vocation , their mission. On the contrary, it is most helpful to keep checking up on what way Vincentians are living out their presence in the world and in the Church. What spirit animates them? What dynamism directs their enterprises?

## **1 The distinctive approach taken by Jesus Christ according to St Vincent**

The reading and re-reading of St Vincent's writings never cease to impress me. Whether it be his correspondence, his conferences to the Daughters of Charity, his talks to the missionaries, the Common Rules of the CM which he himself drew up....What strikes me as the essential point is not so much M Vincent's sense of the poor person, but the distinctive approach taken by Jesus Christ. Who is more personally involved than he is in the world and in the Church of his time? Those men and women who in the most diverse areas of the world consecrate their lives to the poor , the sick, the distant missions, the popular missions?

M. Vincent's involvements are both diverse and multiple. They range from abandoned children to the Council of Conscience, from the animating of missionaries to that of the Daughters of Charity, from the directing of contemplative Sisters of the Visitation to galley slaves, from the formation of priests to parish missions. From 1617 until at least 1653 M. Vincent continued to preach missions and when his health no longer permitted him to do this, he never gave up his longing to be out giving missions.(3) That's not all. M. Vincent was still concerned about missions in Europe and even beyond (Tunis 1645; Algiers 1646, Madagascar 1648....), visits to refugees during the Thirty Years War and all those hours spent on affairs of administration, finance, commerce, legal matters....All these enterprises are directed by M. Vincent without his treading on the heels of Providence, because they are necessary in the service of the poor. Yes certainly, but the more profound reason is because he knows himself to be chosen, called, sent "to do what our Lord himself did and wants us to do: evangelize the poor (1658)". Like Jesus we belong to God and not to ourselves. To Anthony Portail he writes:

*Remember, Father, that we live in Jesus Christ through the death of Jesus Christ, and we must die in Jesus Christ through the life of Jesus Christ; and that our life should be hidden in Jesus Christ and full of Jesus Christ; and that to die like Jesus Christ it is necessary to live like Jesus Christ. (4)*

(You'd think that this was a text of St Augustine). Eight times there occurs the name Jesus Christ in this statement. Four times there is the word *life* and three times the word *death*. And there are the interchangeable link words *:in, through, like* which enable the text to be turned in every direction.

All M. Vincent's letters begin with the formula: The grace of our Lord be with you! It is not rare that in the course of a letter or the middle of a conference M. Vincent recalls a gospel phrase, and example of Jesus. With regard to anything or even nothing he quotes (sometimes even implicitly) a saying of our Lord.

Christ therefore is the centre of the life, the thought and the actions of M.Vincent. Deeply involved in the world and in the Church of his time, M Vincent lives, like Teresa of Avila, in the "divine milieu". He is in total and constant familiarity with our Lord Jesus Christ.

The specific approach of Jesus Christ which characterises M. Vincent is that Jesus whom he follows is the missionary of the Father and the evangelizer of the poor (Lk 4). The following of Christ (Sequela Christi) is the proper task of all the baptised who are called to sanctity on becoming disciples (5), as Vatican II affirms. To put Christ at the centre, at the heart of one's life is the characteristic of the saints, canonized or not.

There is a Vincentian approach to Jesus Christ, but unlike the Franciscan, Ignatian, Bérullian approach, M.Vincent doesn't construct a systematic spirituality. He looks at Jesus Christ in his mission:

"If we ask our Lord: "What did you come on earth to do? To bring help to the poor.....anything else?"and constantly to cite Luke 4,13...which is Jesus's first homily in the synagogue in Nazareth on the sabbath, based on the text of Isaiah 60 : "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me and has sent me to evangelize the poor: the lame walk, etc. And rolling up the book again, Jesus concludes: "Today this passage of scripture is being fulfilled in your ears."(6)

The Christ of M.Vincent is the Christ the evangelizer of the poor. All his undertakings have meaning, value, only because M.Vincent knows himself, wills himself, sees himself as elected, called, sent "to do what our Lord did: "Announce the Good News to the poor". That the Gospel should meet up with the poor not only in words but in facts. "To evangelize", he said, "is to make the Gospel *effective*." This specific approach of Christ the evangelizer of the poor is, it seems to me, the key to the spiritual experience of M.Vincent because it is at the heart of his human experience.

Have you noticed that the life of M.Vincent is made up of two clearly equal periods: before 1617 and after 1617.

By way of synthesizing my thoughts I will say that before 1617 Vincent was involved with putting God into his affairs, and that after 1617 he was putting himself resolutely into God's affairs. This is admittedly a formula, but I want to say that M. Vincent -- like every Gospel missionary -- makes at first tentative moves; that events, persons, "mediations" begin to come into play and allow a deepening of personal experience. That's what happened for the apostles who were called to follow Christ. They followed Jesus of Nazareth with generosity, fervour, confidence, but also they had doubts, with grave crises (Jn 6), with incomprehension, with fears, and also with ambitions. M. Vincent chose the ecclesiastical state seriously, generously. He followed our Lord because that was of use to him. He was a little like John and James, the Boanerges, who coveted the first places, an honourable retirement. He likewise did not know what he was asking. But events were to act as revelatory: with the accusation of theft M.Vincent experienced being excluded. With the temptations against faith, M. Vincent experienced Peter's walking on the waters; he doubts because his basis of support is within himself. It is when he gives himself to God that he begins to get himself gradually pulled together. Encounters: Bèrulle, Francis de Sales, etc.; personalities, the de Gondis, decisive events like those of 1617. Gannes-Folleville which is the encounter with spirituality and the putting down the roots of the Mission. Châtillon which is the encounter with material poverty and the founding of the works of charity. These two poles of Mission and Charity are as it were magnets drawing together all the rest: Mme de Gondi's foundations(7), the Institution of the Congregation of the Mission (1625), the ordinands (1628), the Company of the Daughters of Charity (1633); etc. It is the same M. Vincent; yet it is another M.Vincent. Just as the apostles who followed Jesus of Nazareth are the same; yet they are also different when they are following the risen Christ. They are different while remaining themselves when they go off as missionaries. An episode like the calming of the sea (Mk 4, 35...) is in this respect significant. After his own "popular mission" at

the lakeside, Jesus embarked with his disciples and laid down for a rest in the stern. The wind arose; a storm broke out; panic took over! "Master, save us, we're perishing". "Why are you afraid, people of little faith"! Then rising to his feet he commanded the sea and the wind and there was made a great calm. Who is he whom the sea and the wind obey?

How can you get someone to believe that these fishing mariners (sailors) could be afraid on this lake which was their own instrument of work and the background of their life? Why then are they afraid? When Mark and the other evangelists relate this episode of the calming of the storm, the Church is being persecuted and evangelization is becoming a high-risk mission. The Risen Christ who has promised his presence to those gathered in his name is very absent. The Church and its missionaries feel themselves alone and abandoned. Now, Jesus, before getting into the boat has clearly said: "Let's go to the other side! And it is this journey to the other side which causes fear. The other side is that of the pagans, of the stranger, of the unknown. As long as the disciples were physically with Jesus they were something of "followers" but now to follow Christ is to get committed to serving the Gospel even by going to the pagans. As long as the ship is navigating close to the shore and remains in home waters it can feel secure because it is in the midst of familiar ways, and that brings comfort through its certitudes. But to launch out into the deep and cast out its nets!

That's what Jesus gave Peter to understand in the episode at Caesarea related in Mt 16,13ff. Jesus is checking out what people are saying about him. "For the people, who am I?" The reply seems to point in the right direction: Jesus appears to be a great prophet. But Jesus raises the question: "For you, who am I?" Peter, speaking on behalf of the others, replies with the confession of faith: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God". And Peter, by way of congratulations receives the blessing of the beatitude: "Blessed are you, Simon Bar Jonah! It's not you who are the source of this revelation. It's my Father".

Then Jesus announces his passion, trial, cross, resurrection. Peter remonstrates (like a bodyguard who protects his master by moving in front of him): "That musn't happen to you". Then the reply of Jesus is shattering: "That is not what my Father revealed to you! That's something you've found by yourself alone! Get behind me, *Satan!*"(8) Peter loves Jesus and wants to take on himself alone the mission of Jesus and in the place of Jesus. Jesus puts Peter back into his place as disciple: one who follows. Jesus.

When Matthew and the other evangelists relate this episode, the Church is in the situation of a persecuted community. It cannot rest satisfied with a simple verbal expression of faith (as Peter did before Jesus of Nazareth); what is required now is an active profession of faith which shows belief (to make believing one's personal job, or profession of faith) faced with the cross and death before being resurrected with Christ in glory.

To follow Christ, for missionaries, is to engage oneself in evangelization *as, with, through, in Jesus*. That is when the Apostles re-actualise, re-activate what they have lived out with Jesus. What they have seen, heard, touched of the *Word of life*, that's what they announce. They stir up their memories in order to make an anamnesis. Their memories are made to recall the life, the words, the actions of Jesus and through the power of the Spirit they discover how they should live and speak and act. When they were following Jesus of Nazareth along the roads of Galilee and of Judea, they had witnessed many events... they had the chance of receiving from Jesus himself the explanations of the teachings given in parables. But above all they discover the meaning, the value, the extent of the teachings of Jesus when he was himself taking in hand their

own special formation after they had asked him: "Master, where do you live?" - "Come and see. They went in and stayed with him" (Jn 1,35 -39) (9)

At this stage in my reflexions I would like to draw your attention to a few points:

1 Up to the XVIth century the word "mission" was used exclusively with regard to the doctrine of the Trinity, in the sense of the sending of the Son by the Father and the sending of the Holy Spirit by the Father and the Son. It was from the XVIth century onwards that the Church began using the word to designate its action in announcing the Gospel both to the faithful and to outsiders. It was then that one spoke of popular mission and of propagation of the faith.

2 St Vincent sets the roots of mission and charity within the mystery of the most Holy Trinity because this is strongly noted in his spiritual experience through his baptism. This for two reasons, in my view.

The first reason is that, on giving himself to God, he is giving himself to all that God is: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. You will notice that St Vincent insists a lot on Providence, on the link between Jesus and his Father, on the obedience of Jesus to the will of the Father, on prayer. And he regularly refers to the Holy Trinity in order to situate mission and charity. (10)

The second reason is that St Vincent always worked with lay people in all the undertakings of the mission and of charity. This was right from Gannes, Folleville and Châtillon. In addition to his teams (Priests of the Mission, Daughters of Charity, Ladies of Charity...) he imposes a link between *mission* and *charity*. Not one without the other, because the two enterprises are at the heart of the *Yes* to God. The mission should have as a result the setting up of a charity and the activities should have an evangelising value. That is to say they ought to tend to the development and to the salvation of the entire person including his spiritual dimension. This is a characteristic of the approach of Christ the evangeliser of the poor.

I insist on this baptismal character because, as a rule, when there is mention of missionaries following Christ, reference is bound to be made to the experience of the Apostles. But here the argument is based on the Fourth Gospel and especially on the discourse after the Last Supper. So much so that the missionaries appear to be only the apostles or the disciples. This is to forget that behind these New Testament texts there are existing Christian communities which are "missionaries". A consideration of the letters to the Churches in the Apocalypse would facilitate an escaping from the problem of reserving mission to certain individuals or types of witness in the Church.

Let's not forget that St Vincent, while respecting their own particular vocation, addressed his remarks to the Brothers as well as to the Priests of the Mission, and that, in the matter of essentials, these have the same application to the Daughters of Charity. For him the mission is not the reserve of specialist missionaries who have been given an ordained ministry. Mission is an obligation on all, for it inheres in the identity of the Church as it does in that of Jesus. The Church is the People of God on mission to the people. And so, baptised into Christ, it is in Christ that we have been baptised. Missionaries must therefore faithfully reproduce the vocation of the Son of God. More than that. In order the better to imitate Jesus -- on whom Vincent bestows the paschal title Our Lord -- we must identify with Him; live in Him, through Him, with Him so that it should be his Spirit that would be the dynamic of our participation in evangelisation: Our Lord is the *Rule* of the Mission.

Missionaries following Christ means therefore seeking to be more and more disciples of Christ in order to announce the Gospel more effectively. No missionaries without union with Christ, who is the incarnation of that Charity which is God. (11) Vincentians are chosen, called,

sent in order to be prophets who proclaim by their words, by their life, by their commitments that they belong to God and not to themselves, just as Christ doesn't come to do his own will but that of the Father with whom he is one. The dynamic of their apostolic life is: Our Lord Jesus Christ, the missionary of the Father "who became poor to enrich us through his poverty". (Col. 1,25-28).

### **A particular relationship with the poor**

I intend the word "poor" to be taken in the singular and in the plural. The poor continue to multiply infinitely, yet each poor person is loved for their own sake. Whether it's a group or an individual, any work for or with the poor implies an entering into relationship.

There again the missionaries are following Christ. The evangeliser of the poor proclaims the Good News of salvation; and it is primarily Good News for the poor (Lk 4,13) because it takes concret shape in the changes brought into the lives of the poor: the lame walk, the blind see, etc. This making of a link between the Good News of salvation and the poor is a constant in the Word of God. It is even a criterion of authenticity regarding relationship with God, from the time of the Exodus onwards.

I'm not going to take you on a run through the Bible. I'd just like to share with you what I've learned through my own personal experience as a Vincentian who has been proclaiming the Gospel, and accompanying priests and laity in their commitments, notably through the St Vincent de Paul Conferences.

In my view the key-problem about mission is the relationship between charity and what is humanitarian. For neither the church nor the Vincentians have the monopoly on the poor. Besides, the situations in which the poor are struggling are matters of responsibility for the State and for society: they are social problems. Justice is at stake. Those who carry out humanitarian action and are involved in social struggle for the liberation of the poor are not for the most part Christians and at times they act with great competence and with remarkable generosity and effective means. In such new contexts, what is the meaning of evangelising the poor? What is the place of charity in missionary witness?

At the heart of mission, as at the heart of charity, we find relationship. Without relationship there is no mission, no charity. God is in himself relationship, and wants us to be beings in relationship. Relationship is the core of our spiritual experience, the axis of our undertakings and our commitments. This relationship is both personal and personalised. For Vincentians the poor person has always had a face; they take pity on the crowds of poor people abandoned like sheep without shepherds. And so they'll set about multiplying loaves.

(It would be good to use John 6 as a basis for carrying out an actualised Vincentian reading of the multiplication of the loaves and the discourse on the bread of life. This whole scenario poor, mission, material and spiritual needs....where there is a passing from daily bread to the bread come from heaven which is the person of Jesus. Let's not forget that it was with regard to a talk on the eucharist that St Vincent makes the affirmation: "Charity is infinitely inventive".) (12)

What characterises the special relationship with the poor according to the Vincentian spiritual experience is its rootedness and its personal dimension. And this relationship is "trinitarian": poor person, me, us. Poor person and myself: we're distinct and yet "one" in an enriching relationship. Paul says "*transformed*" (Eph. 1,4) in speaking of our relationship to

Father, Son and Spirit. Our relationship with the poor, an expression of our relationship with God, has a creative power. The Holy Spirit wells up into the relationship and, when it is true and authentic, confers on it personal characteristics. Beyond mere sympathy or empathy, relationship creates communion.

The special Vincentian characteristic is that this relationship is directed towards the person of Christ the evangelizer of the poor recognised and served in the person of poor people encountered concretely in day-to-day living along my route which is the itinerary of my life while also constituting the course of History.

Three gospel episodes -- which we don't have the time to meditate on -- reinforce my conviction:

1 Lk 4,13 already cited which indissolubly links the liberation of the poor to the Good News of salvation incarnated in the presence of Jesus consecrated by the Spirit of the Father.

2 Mt 25, a prodigious text! The last judgment of the Nations has as its central concern the poor and especially the littlest ones. No accusations about doctrine, morality, religious practice, prayer, virtues, etc. Everything is focussed on the transforming (or otherwise) relationship which the nations (and not merely Christians) have had with the poor, that is with those who are lacking the essentials to be fully able to stand up as men and women: food, clothing, water, health, freedom.

The astonishment of the good and the bad people doesn't come from their ignorance of the poor whom they've all seen, but from their ignorance of the relationship of Christ to the poor. Serving the poor is honouring Christ.

3 Lk 10: The Good Samaritan. A journey, a traveller who is attacked, beaten almost to death, left at the side of the road that always leads from a Jerusalem to a Jericho, from the Temple of the divine glory and the divine law of the 1st and 2nd commandments to the desert and the Dead Sea. Specialists in mission and charity come along: they see and then cross to the other side. A Samaritan comes along, that is an enemy, a marginalised, who doesn't go to the Temple, and accepts as word of God only the Pentateuch and the Book of Joshua, or in other words a truncated Torah....This man sees, stops, helps, gives aid, entrusts the wounded man to others (thus networking) and enables the man to be no longer prone but upright and lively. He's the one who practised the commandments. He was made into neighbour through his relationship with the man left half-dead.

I cherish these three texts because they are so expressive of the mission and charity. Thus:

Lk 4,13 is the key-text of the Congregation of the Mission following Christ the evangelizer of the poor.

Mt 25 is the key-text of the Ladies and the Daughters of Charity who, gathered in the name of the Most Holy Trinity, honour Our Lord by serving him in the person of the poor.

Lk 10 is a key-text of the St Vincent de Paul Conferences of Frederic Ozanam and his companions, for it expresses personalised relationships, the charity of drawing near.

These three texts give expression to the paschal mystery which begins to unfold through the activities of the mission. But they also give expression to Christ in his paschal mystery: he is the evangelizer of the poor, He is the one who comes to the aid of people left half-dead on the

roadways of our times. So, in order to follow Christ it's not merely a matter of imitating Him but of identifying with Him in his mission and his charity. Or, to speak like St Vincent, mission requires that our Lord should be involved in it, and we with Him....and, thinking about tomorrow's talk on the missionary Church, --- not by way of conclusion but with the aim of helping you to internalise what I have been so imperfectly trying to share with you, I will add this:

Karl Barth, the Protestant German theologian, points out that after reading the hymn to charity in 1 Corinthians 12,13, one doesn't know for definite what is charity and that perfect way which remains after faith and hope have disappeared. He gives this advice which I pass on to you: In the hymn, replace the word, *charity, love, by Christ...*And you will see the meaning of "following Christ", being his disciple.

You will see that what's important is not carrying out works of charity, but allowing charity to work upon you.

### **What Church to build?**

To your question I respond by a question which I ask and which you should ask yourself... "You tell me what way you announce the Gospel in your popular mission and I help you to discern the sort of Church you are building!"

But to help you in your work and to get you to share what I already sense, I add:

We are called to build a Church in "Diaspora", by reason of four major challenges (Cf. SIEV -- preceding session).

- Secularisation: or the emancipation of the social and cultural components from religious tutelage
- Migration and inter-marriage
- The power of the image (ikons? or idols?)
- "Organised" poverties.

Facing the extraordinary changes we are living through today:  
the Church is only one VOICE among others at the level of discourse;  
the Church is only one WAY among others at the level of engagement in the multiplicity of messages of salvation and the modalities of believing.

The ideal is : that its actions should correspond with its words,  
that its undertakings should speak and correspond to its discourse.

There is in fact neither decline nor re-awakening of religion but *destruction* of the religious phenomena and thus a tacit appeal for *restorations*.

Can the spiritual be disengaged from the temporal?  
Is religious experience without a link to social function?

*Diaspora* Cf. Old Testament and New Testament

We need a theology of the laity.

When road-signs are lacking along our route,  
when one is no longer seeking a direction as one looks at the compass,  
no more moving ahead is possible, no more orientation (there where the sun rises!), hence no horizon.

There's only immobility or errancy.

Social institutions and cultural models are to be considered as  
mediations,  
means which are necessary, but passing,  
transitory,  
momentary, suiting one given moment,  
one given situation.

They are therefore necessary and relative, provisional.

So they are not an iron-collar of an immobile society, nor pliable objects which can be manipulated.

They are the institutions,

They are the models, a security

belonging to the stages of an accepted itinerary

because the world changes,

because we change,

because the world changes us

and because in order to change the world, we must change ourselves.

It's the same with the Church (and the Churches).

It shows a way when it doesn't seek to fix the Gospel into institutions, models, structures.

In the First Century, the community of those who followed the *way*.

In the Second Century, the community of Christians (Acts 2) is called: *parokia*...and the Christians *parokoi* = strangers, in order to stress their fragile, threatened character; the Christian, like the believer since Abraham's day, is a traveller, a nomad.

Cf. The Letter to Diogenes.

Cf. NT, 1 Pi 1-5; Hebrews; Paul (Captivity Letters).

Translator: Stanislaus Brindley CM

1 Conference given at the International Vincentian Month organized by SIEV on the theme of "Popular Missions".

2 Cf Message of the Bishops of France to young Catholics on the occasion of the World Youth Days held in 1997 in France and in Paris with the Pope from 19 - 24 August.

(3) Cf S.V. IV, 586, 589, 604. See R. Chalumeau, Saint Vincent et ses missions en France au XVII<sup>ème</sup> siècle, in Bulletin de la Société d'Études du XVII<sup>ème</sup> siècle, 1958, 41, pp 317-327, J.-P.

Renouard Le zèle chez S. Vincent de Paul, Semaine Vincentienne, 20-30 octobre, Paris 1987, in BLF tiré à part pp 1-6.

(4) C.f. S.V. I, 295

(5) C.f. Lumen Gentium 1.

(6) Here Luke is giving us the definition of the liturgical homily: an actualising of the Word of God proclaimed in the assembly.

(7) Cf S.V. XIII pp. 197-206.

(8) The nearest English equivalent would be "Go to hell", you're like a devil trying to turn me from my work.

(9) This is the phrase focussed on for the World Youth Days.

(10) See the first regulation for the first Charité of December 1617; likewise the Constitutions of the DCs and the Common Rules of the CM.

(11) Cf. Paul VI, Evangelii nuntiandi; John Paul II, Redemptoris Missio.

(12) S.V. XI,146

(13) The tomb of Frederic Ozanam is located in the crypt of the Carmelite Church at the Institut Catholique of Paris, rue de Vaugirard, behind the fresco which depicts the parable of the Good Samaritan.

## What sort of church to construct?

*Raymond Facelina, C.M.*

Once upon a time....It's a true story I'm going to tell you. It happened in 1965. That is to say three years after the country came to independence and at the end of the Second Vatican Council. The two events are important and likewise the date for the Church in Algeria.

1965 was the year when the first President of the first Algerian Republic was overthrown by a coup which broke out without any violence in the country. BOUMEDIENNE succeeded BEN BELLA. Algeria opted for socialism as a doctrine and a political model.

1965 was the end of Vatican Council II. The archbishop of Algeria, Mgr Etienne Duval had just been made a cardinal. Now, the church in Algeria which comprises four dioceses (Algiers, Oran, Constantine, Lagouat) has less than 10,000 faithful. It is a minority international community comprising, on the one hand, stable elements like the long-time Christians who remained after independence, and especially priests and religious; and on the other hand, mobile elements fluctuating with the ups and downs of international agreements for cooperation. More than 200 churches or chapels out of use due to lack of christian communities, had been put back into the hands of the local communes or, when they were the property of the diocese, affected to social activities. So this was a minority international Church dispersed throughout a country which was mainly Muslim and politically socialist. The migratory flow of (technical) cooperation brought to Algeria French, Russian, Chinese, Bulgarian, Hungarian, Polish, North Korean, Cuban, English, technicians; and Arab, Egyptian, Syrian, Lebanese, French co-workers, as well as industrialists. Amongst these were some Arab or other Eastern Christians....The highly structured Church had therefore few faithful. The Algerian Christians, mainly of Berber origin (Kabyles) kept a very low-profile.

In three years the Church completely changed its appearance. In July 65 there took place in Algeria a priestly month for the clergy of the four dioceses. We queried our presence as Church in this new environment. We had studied the documents of Vatican II : Church, Religious Liberty, the Church's Missionary Activity, Non-christian Religions, etc. Revelation, the Ministry and Life of Priests....

The Cardinal frequently intervened. While enjoying all the rich nourishment provided by Vatican II, he was at the same time, like all of us, rather impoverished in the face of this new mode of presence of the Church confronted by changes in the country which affected Christians. What was to become of the Church? Then, in a spirit of hopefulness, he threw at us this phrase: *"Let's stop looking at ourselves. The Church hasn't to make people come to her. She is sent to the world. She is the Church of Christ, her centre lies at her periphery!"* (sic). Copernicus must have turned in his grave! But these words of the Cardinal were a prophecy of hope and of faith. He wanted to make us understand clearly that mission precedes Church and that the institutional Church was eschatological, and not centred on itself. The Church is essentially missionary;

otherwise it doesn't exist. What needs to be propagated therefore is not the Church but the Gospel with a view to the building up of the Kingdom: the Church is sent out. (1)

The fourteen years which I spent at Strasbourg in Alsace, in ecumenical dialogue as delegate of the bishop and thus representing the Catholic Church, have made me sensitive to the divergent approaches of the Churches regarding important points in ecclesiology, especially those which relate to the foundation of the Church, to authority in the Church, to ministries in the Church. The approach of the Protestant Churches (2) deriving from the Reformation (Lutheran and Reformed) is not the same as that of the Catholic Church and still less of the Orthodox Churches. The question "*What sort of Church to construct?*" In the context of ecumenical dialogue would bring us -- if we were in a theological meeting--to hear and receive other points of view than our own and would lead us likewise to take more account of the different approaches of other Christian churches. One can legitimately wonder if theological reflexion can be carried out at the present moment without an ecumenical perspective.

I therefore take the question "*What sort of Church to construct?*" as the *expression* which synthesises other questionings regarding the models of Church judged unsatisfactory and as the *easpiration* towards other models which would be better adapted to the present-day world. So here we are on institutional territory and therefore on what concerns the visibility of the Church or its spread. 3

I propose a three-fold approach:

- I. Models of Church in the Catholic Church**
- II. "Christianising " our Catholicism**
- III. "Catholicising" our Christianity**

I'll try to put some meaning into these titles which are deliberately provocative in their formulation.

## **I. Models of church in the catholic church**

It is up to you in the group- work and discussions to continue these reflexions and especially to share your personal, national and continental approaches. If there is so much talk about the irreversible necessity of *inculturation* of Christianity or of the Church, even of communities, it is that the individual churches experience a deep constant, feeling of the necessity for them to incarnate the Faith of the universal Church locally in the cultures which fashion and provide means of expression to the peoples among whom they have been sent.

This explains in part the multiplicity of the models of the Churches in the Northern hemisphere and in the Southern. But account needs also to be taken of the status of each church according to the region where it is located and the situation it is granted:

In some countries, the Church is present in the *Power mode*. This is where the church is a majority; the church formerly called Christianity. It is recognised and asserts itself. This it is able to do: it has effective powers and laws therefore which are publicly acknowledged. It possesses goods, patrimony, influence, power. But, for the Church isn't power dangerous?

In some countries the Church is present in the *Liberty mode*. This is where the church is separated from the State. It has freedom to think, to act, to celebrate, and even the liberty to

speak in matters of civil legislation which it respects and which respects it in a cohabitation sometimes regulated by a concordat. Isn't liberty for the church enviable?

In some countries the church is present in the *Poverty mode*. This is where the Church is in the minority, in areas unfavourable to its activities, or in high-risk countries. The Church which is present in the poverty mode possesses neither power nor liberty. It is sometimes obliged to be clandestine and always discreet both internally and regarding its external mission....This is the case in countries where other religious currents enjoy a majority and priority, recognized as "State religion". The Church which is present in the poverty mode seems due to become more and more the mode of the Church. But for the Church isn't poverty viable?

Dangerous, enviable, viable: the Church's mode of presence is also conditioned by the world and the society in which it exists. It cohabits, peacefully or otherwise, with other religious stances: Buddhism, Islam, but also other religious groupings, other spiritual currents and even sects, and it coexists in a world which is globally unbelieving and societies, formerly Christian, which don't yet renounce their Christian roots, but which have become massively indifferent. As a result of all this, the Church -- by the very fact of its being and its sending by Christ -- which has a universal outlook tending to embrace the totality of human existence up to and including eternal destiny, achieves little or no success in taking hold of the real life which goes on in society and thus of the lives of people in general.

The Church is out of kilter and often wrong-footed not only with regard to new questions in social ethics or bioethics, but also with regard to serious problems concerning birth, death, illness, and their regulation, and the mentalities and behaviour even of their own faithful. Christian morality, referred to as traditional, common sense wouldn't suffice to provide guidelines. Reducing these questions and their ramifications to individual "cases of conscience" has a risk of giving formal authority to inhuman responses or making privileged a particular cultural approach or that of a majority in an opinion poll.

From these slippages there results certain dis-harmonies with regard to the 60 - 80 period and especially the previous period where the Church (and the Christian churches) had greater presence, expansion and influence. One of these disharmonies is certainly that of the claims of individualism which is running through society in the North and which is not balanced out by the Church since religious and moral matters have become "privatised".

The Church therefore finds itself situated in a world which has been taken in hand by man. The world has become an autonomous world, with its own consistency, energies and objectives; the world has its own energy which it directs throughout the cosmos. People have taken the world into their own hands, including humanity's destiny. This grasp which men have taken on the world leads to denying, ignoring, eliminating the presence of God, and even the possibility for God to intervene in the world and in the affairs of men. Men's projects and God's project follow different trajectories which no longer meet.

And so asking the question "What sort of Church to construct?" means feeling very strongly the urgent need for a harmonious re-adjustment within the faith and in the mode of the Church's presence. It means suffering from this lack of focus with regard to the image of God, of Christ, of the faith, of Church doctrine and of the Church itself. This impression of vagueness, lack of focus is reinforced by the fact that, in spite of the advances of the ecumenical movement, Christians and the churches are divided while claiming to come from Christ. It is a divided Christianity which is made a spectacle to the world by the divided churches. And - my

experience with ecumenical work permits me to say so -- the divisions are sometimes greater within the same church than between separated churches.

This vagueness affects the understanding of the Church which Christians and Catholics Christians can have. Christian identity is at stake and there is doubt about Catholic identity in our Church. It is therefore a question of permanently rediscovering the spiritual and moral vigour of a Christianity capable of re-fashioning man. The Protestant churches are also faced with the same questions (4), and their presence also has an effect on the behaviour of Catholics. I shall cite just a few points for dialogue if not for confrontation in the Catholic Church: Christian faith with or without a Church? who has authority in the Church? the place of ministries? the person of the minister? the sacraments; the place of women and their accession to ministry...since some churches are doing it, like the Anglicans...

## II. "Christianising" our catholicism

By using that expression I intend to say that the basis for participation in the Church is baptism, and that one is first of all a Christian even if one can be so only in a Church. And I add that if we have a problem in believing in the Church, this comes not so much from the vagueness, the doubts, some heavy-handedness and even certain counter-witness offered by the institution or the services of its organisation. It comes from the fact that our faith in Christ is not full enough. For, either Christ founded his Church or he didn't build it. If we believe that Christ built his Church, whatever is not going well in it comes from us, from those who went before us, but also from us; there is the possibility of reforming, renewing, purifying. It is therefore legitimate to aspire to having new modes of the Church's presence to the world and in the world while holding firmly that it is through Christ and in his Spirit from God, and that it is sent into the world to lead people to God.

The Church reforms itself only when it rediscovers the fundamental traits of the unique Church of Jesus Christ which gives structure to authentic faith. (5)

If the Church appears to be the agent responsible for the Christian mission, it is not its origin. The authentic mission springs from the action of God carried out in and through Jesus Christ, the envoy par excellence of the Father.(6) It is in the same movement that, in their own turn, Christians are sent.(7)

Every christian interpretation of the missionary action of the Church should be referred to the Mission of God which precedes it and which judges it and which one grasps through considering the *Sending* of Jesus of Nazareth into the world.

Announcing the Gospel means pointing to Jesus as the Christ, as the unique being in whom all people are called to recognise their own humanity and to keep making their way towards a new humanity...like Nicodemus(Jn 3). The Church has no mission in the world except by reference to the existence of Jesus and to the vocation which He incarnated in the world.

"Christianising our Catholicism" means then that the Church doesn't have to take on its own Gospel with a view to expanding itself, but has to announce the Gospel of Christ, the Gospel of the Kingdom. This Gospel doesn't become clear except in connexion with this particular man Jesus of Nazareth, put to death under Pontius Pilate "whom God has made Lord and Christ". (8) To speak of Jesus Christ dead and resurrected, whom God has made Lord and Christ is to announce God's Envoy and discern that in Him the Kingdom of God is close at hand.

(9) The Church is the community participating in the mission of Jesus Christ, the Envoy of the Father. There's no ecclesiology, no missiology without christology and hence without meditation and saturation in the Mystery of the *Trinity*. (10)

Why does the Gospel of St Luke at the end of the first century (80 - 90) recount for us the admirable episode of the disciples of Emmaus? if not to "christianise" the shaky faith of the Church? Here's a very personal reading of this story on which we'll never have finished meditating. Here it is:

*It's the first day of the week. Two disciples are very sadly returning home. They are having a discussion. Jesus joins them on the road but they are unaware of him. They "recount" the events concerning Jesus. They share their shattered hopes with Jesus. A blockage concerning Jesus of Nazareth confronts them. Jesus then opens their spirit to an understanding of the Scriptures and of God's project concerning Him. Arrived at their stopping place they invite Jesus to remain with them. He enters, He remains, He shares the meal with them. He takes the bread, says the blessing, shares the bread. Then their eyes are opened; but He has disappeared from their sight. Up they get, full of joy. At full speed they return to Jerusalem. They rejoin the group gathered around Peter. They get no time to speak. The disciples confirm for them the Good News: "He is risen, He has shown Himself to Simon".*

*And they tell how their hearts were burning within them on the road while He was explaining the Scriptures and how they recognised Him in the breaking of the bread.*

The disciples -- you and I -- do not see how to construct the future. They are flattened, crippled. It is the Risen Christ who is Jesus of Nazareth. The same, and yet other. In heading for Emmaus they are turning their backs on the future, they are blocked into what they already know. Christ will open them up to what they need to learn. And St Luke's Church shows us the sign-posts for "Christianising" our faith. (12)

- 1 The Word of God which must be taken hold of on the basis of the Resurrection: "It was necessary that the Christ should suffer and so enter into Glory". That's the *doxologia*.
  - 2 The Faith received and transmitted: Spirits slow to believe the full message.. The *homelia*
  - 3 The breaking of the bread: that's the *eucharistia*.
  - 4 The returning to the community. That's the *ecclesia*.
  - 5 The sharing of the same Faith in community: that's the *koinonia*, the communion.
  6. The discovery leading to joy: Jesus is the way, the truth, the life. They were "partisans for Jesus", they become disciples (that's the *sequela christi*) and discover that only if 2 or 3 are gathered in *His Name*, the Christ is in their midst.
- After Emmaus Luke gives us the Ascension and Pentecost. With the sending out in the *Holy Spirit* there'll have to be a "Catholicising of our Christianity".

### **III. "Catholicising our Christianity"**

Cf Acts 10-11. It is midday. It's hot. Peter who is lodging with Simon the tanner at Joppe (Jaffa) feels hungry. The meal isn't ready. Peter goes up on the roof and takes a little siesta. Peter falls asleep. Peter dreams, and in the dream, cooking gets mixed up with theology.

There is a three-fold coming down and going up of a table garnished with foods forbidden by Jewish Law. Peter refuses to partake of what is impure. His dream, which becomes a nightmare, concludes; they are calling him. Strange visitors are looking to speak with him. Peter welcomes pagans into Simon the Tanner's house. He offers them hospitality. Next day he accompanies them to Caesarea where the centurion Cornelius, a Roman, an enemy, has made an appointment with him, also based on a dream. Then it is that Peter understands the meaning of his own dream: "God makes no distinction between men"...While making very clear his own position in the face of Jewish traditions (especially because of the brothers of the Jerusalem Church who also accompanied him) he announces the Paschal Mystery of the Risen Christ. Then, the Holy Spirit having "gone ahead", Peter baptises Cornelius and his household.

It's on his return to Jerusalem that Peter runs into trouble. The "official" Church submits him to interrogation: explain yourself! Why did you enter the house of the uncircumcised, why have you eaten with them? Peter has to justify his behaviour (Acts 11, 1-17). His argumentation focussed on 3 points:

- 1 The call to the pagans.
- 2 The announcing of the Good News (Kerygma).
- 3 The coming of the Holy Spirit.

The conclusion had to follow: Baptism.

And Peter in his turn challenged the Church: "If God has given them the same gift as ourselves for having believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to make obstacles to God?" (Acts 11,17).

These words pacify them and they give glory to God who, to the pagans also, grants the repentance which leads to life. (Acts 11,18).

This passage is wonderfull in many ways.

It renders the Paschal Mystery very concrete:

- the movement of the pagans into faith in the risen Christ,
- the movement by the Church, still locked into Judaism, towards its universal dimension,
- the movement of the Church itself towards a greater understanding of the Mystery of Jesus,
- the movement of the Church to a greater acceptance of the role of the Spirit.

The universality of the Christian Faith is not that of the Church -- nor of the Churches -- but it is that of Christ through his Spirit. The universality of the Gospel is not separable from the person of Jesus: as the Father has sent Jesus, Jesus sends the Church (Jn 20,21). The mission of the Church is similar to that of Jesus and is an element in the same economy of sending which carries out God's love for the world.

Mission carries the Church forward: it becomes de-centred from itself; it re-centres itself on Christ, it concentrates "on its periphery" on the pagans.

Journeying leads the Church to deepen its rootedness in Christ, the unique saviour and universal mediator. The de-centering that the Gospel of Christ brings about for the missionary Church is not a rush forward to anticipate the realisation of the Kingdom of God, but a seeking for a new and concrete solidarity, and a reciprocity with men and women in the daily happenings of each particular situation.

Christ the Evangeliser of the poor bears witness to the Kingdom through proximity to little ones, the poor, the excluded. Missions find their authenticity in a similar solidarity because they are the expression of charity without which, St Paul says, Faith and Hope, however great they may be, are only wind and noise (1Cor 13).

But the Mission also bears witness to its universal dimension by stating that the Gospel is not "politically" neutral. There must be a correlation between the word which is spoken, embracing the sharing of life and the announcement of the Good News which creates a new world involving the fight against injustice and the liberation of oppressed people like sinners.

The Mission is not centred on the Church. It is the "MISSIO DEI". It is trinitarian. It mediates the love of God the Father for all people and peoples whoever they may be or wherever they may be in all the situations in which they can be found. The Mission is the Epiphany, the actualisation of God's presence in the world.(13) It is at the service of the presence of God the Holy Spirit who breathes where he wills, without our knowing either whence he comes or where he is going (Jn 3,8). The Mission is the expression of the life of the Holy Spirit on whom no limits are set. The Mission therefore concerns the world here and now which is everyone's world, away beyond the limits of the Church. The world such as it is and with people such as they are, whom God loves, and to which the Church is sent in the footsteps of Christ to be "salt of the earth", "the light of the world" (Jn 3,16).

### **What sort of church to construct?**

The Church-communion split off from the Church-institution?

The Church-institution? or the prophetic Church? But an institution without prophecy grows dry with paralysis; and prophecy without institution degenerates into adventurism...

The Church of the Poor? or the Church dispersed? The hierarchical Church to which one runs the risk of opposing the Church of the people of God. The altogether charismatic Church? I don't know. What I do know is that Christ is the One sent by the Father and he sends his Church out through the whole world; and that the Church is the Church of God for men and women, and the Church of men and women is for God. Its mission expresses the "extraverti" character of the love of God. Its mission concerns all people and all of each person, and means healing, serving, "reconciling", pardoning a divided and wounded humanity.

*"Fear not, little flock! I have overcome the world", Jesus says. And he also says: "Go out into the whole world. I am with you to the end of the world".*

Let's not be afraid of mentioning God to people, to the world as Jesus did, in the concrete situations into which we are sent. When we go off for a mission we are heading towards "a meeting with grace". God through his Spirit moves ahead of us and himself builds his Church.

Translator : Stanislaus Brindley CM

(1) Cf. R. Facelina, "Théologie en situation. Une communauté chrétienne dans le Tiers-Monde" (Algérie 1962 - 1974). Etude pour le 5ème Colloque du CERDIC; Strasbourg, Cerdic-publication 1974, p 327 ff.

(2) M. A. Chevalier, "Jésus a-t-il voulu une Église ?", E.T.R., 1990, 4.

(3) Cf. G. Delteil et P. Keller, "L'Église disséminée. Itinéraire et enracinement, Lumen vitae", Cerf, Laba et Fides, 1995, p. 329.

(4) D. Bonhoeffer.

What is the specific place for the Church? It is impossible to give a concrete answer at the first attempt. It is the place of the Christ present in the world....That's why people would be unable to indicate it or to occupy it in advance. God qualifies it by the grace of his presence. All people can do is to recognise this. The Church does not possess the right to proclaim this or that historical place as being God's place... While waiting for God to make his choice, it avoids taking over favourable-looking places: it must try to leave space for God's action.

(5) Cf. J. Florkowsky, CM. "L'Église en France, aujourd'hui", BLF spécial 1987. Semaine Vincentienne 26-30 octobre 1987.

(6) Cf Jn 3,16; 5,24; 6,29.

(7) Cf Mt 28,19; Jn 17,18

(8) Cf Acts 2,36.

(9) Cf Mt 3,2

(10) Cf. St. Augustine, "The faithful know what the Body of Christ is, if they don't neglect to be the Body of Christ. Let them become the Body of Christ if they wish to live by the Spirit of Christ. Only the Body of Christ lives by the Spirit of Christ" (in Joan. Tractatus, 26,13).

(11) Cf. St. Augustin: "Before Jesus Christ every perspective is blocked; after Jesus Christ is risen, all becomes retrospectively clear".

(12) Note the liturgical structure of the passage: Word of God + homily + sacrament =LITURGIA.

## **Announcing the good news of salvation in the steps of Saint Vincent**

*Emeric Amyot d'Inville CM*

As missionaries, one of our first responsibilities consists in building up the faith of people who are often disorientated, weak in their beliefs, tempted by the sects, or at times non-believers who are seeking faith. So what is required is an announcing of the good news of Jesus Christ who died and rose again to save us. In other words the kerygma proclaimed by the Church since the day of Pentecost. And from that base to give a widely comprehensive presentation of the faith in order to help people of our day to achieve a better grasp of their faith and to live it in a coherent fashion. This announcement of the faith through parish missions (1)---- beginning as we do at the heart of the matter, namely Christ's death and resurrection for our salvation---- will be the theme for today. Tomorrow we shall approach another aspect: moral behaviour and conversion of life.

The reflexion which I am proposing to you will start from the experience of St Vincent. For him this aspect was absolutely central in his missionary ministry. My wish is that the experience and the teaching of our founder might help us to reflect today on a dimension of the popular mission which is not always evident, but which in my opinion ought always to be seen as fundamental. And then the Irish mission team will offer us some reflexions on proclaiming the faith in the cultural context of their own country.

### **1. A Situation of religious ignorance**

St Vincent, as we saw on a previous day, was struck by the profound ignorance of the faith among poor country folk who were abandoned by the Church. So much so that in his opinion their eternal salvation was at risk. *The ignorance of the poor people is almost unbelievable* (XI,81), he said to his missionaries. *They don't know how many gods there are, how many persons in God* (XII,305), he wrote. Mission reports provide abundant descriptions of this profound ignorance. *Asking them if there is a God*, wrote Etienne Blatiron from Corsica, *or if there are several, and which of the three divine persons became man for us was like speaking Arabic!*. Examples could be multiplied since mission reports are so full of descriptions of the deplorable situation of the country people who were baptised into the Catholic Church but were failing to understand and to live the faith. And so, in certain regions, many of them were passing over to Protestantism, *as a result of not hearing mention of God, so they say, from the Catholic Church!* Such is the lament of St Vincent (I, 514).

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(1) "Popular Missions" is not a phrase which is used in Great Britain and Ireland; so, in order to translate "Mission Populaire", I have written "Parish Mission", the current expression in those countries.

Translator.

Why is this religious ignorance so serious? Saint Vincent gives the following reply to his missionaries: *How can a soul who doesn't know God, and doesn't know what God has done for love of him, how can such a soul believe, hope and love? And how will this soul be saved without faith, without hope, without love? (XII, 81).* Hence the need to announce Christ the saviour.

## **2. Announcing the good news of salvation**

St Vincent's means for remedying this sad situation is parish missions. *Now, God, says St Vincent to his confrères.... wished in his great mercy to bring a remedy to that (situation) through the missionaries, having sent them in order to enable these poor people to be saved.* And a little further on he continues

*O, Saviour! ....you raise up a Company for that purpose; you have sent it to the poor and you wish it to make you known to them as the one true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent into the world so that by this means they might have eternal life (XII, 81).* It is through knowledge of the one true God and of his Son Jesus Christ the saviour that salvation comes to us. It is this core of the faith that is at the centre of missionary catechesis so that, through believing it and living it, those who welcome it are given new life, eternal life.

We know for a fact that, in the Common Rules, St Vincent established for the missionaries the objective of *going , after the example of Our Lord and his disciples, through the villages and hamlets, in order to break the bread of the word of God for the little ones (C.R. 2).* Listed first was preaching which tended to take up themes of a moral order in an effort to remedy numerous disorders in the personal, family and social life of people who were often far removed from the gospel ideal.

Catechetics, for its part, has as its objective the transmission of the faith. It is this latter which interests us here and anyway it is the most important in the eyes of St Vincent who wrote in 1638: *The fruit yielded by the missions comes from the catechism classes (I,429),* because that is where the faith of the people is strengthened and built up.

In the concrete, teaching catechism has as its objective the announcing of the principal mysteries of the faith (the Trinity, the Incarnation and the Eucharist), as well as the commandments of God, the creed and the Our Father. Missioners ought to explain them in the simplest possible manner by adapting themselves to the capacity of these very simple people who lack intellectual formation. Unfortunately we possess only one single text of the catechism teachings given by St Vincent. It is a teaching about the Trinity, given on a mission to the poor of the Name of Jesus (hospice), during the summer of 1631 ( XIII, 156 - 163). It is wonderful. In it we find reproduced the patient dialogues of St Vincent with all the simple, eloquent images which he chose in order to put across his message.

A superficial reading of St Vincent could let us believe that, through catechism teaching, he and the missionaries contented themselves with providing religious indoctrination, imposing, come what may, a learning by heart of the great abstract truths on people who were incapable of thereby welcoming any message about salvation. It is not impossible that some missionaries might have shown such a tendency, or that they might have over-stressed fear and threats of hell if the people didn't submit, since this exaggeration was current at the time.

However, St Vincent's most deeply felt aim, and very probably also his practice, was quite different. For him it is good news which has to be announced, in line with what he put as the motto on the seal of the Congregation: *He sent me to bring the good news to the poor*. This means new life, and a love coming from Christ which liberates us, and which we are called to imitate in regard to God and our neighbour. This is the fire of the love of God and of the neighbour which comes directly from Jesus and which must be communicated. We are to inflame the world with it, he says to his missionaries:

*Our vocation therefore is to go, not into one parish or into one diocese only, but throughout the entire earth. For what purpose? To inflame the hearts of men, to do what the Son of God has done; he who came to cast fire on the earth and spread over it the flames of his love; what have we to desire unless that his love should burn and consume all? Let us reflect on this. It is true then that I have been sent not only to love God but to make him loved. It is not enough that I love God if my neighbour does not also love him. I ought to love my neighbour as being the image of God and the object of his love and reciprocally cause men to love their most lovable Creator, who knows them and recognises them as brothers and has so loved them as to deliver his own Son to death for them...(XII, 262 - 263)* That is the whole purpose of the mission. It begins with the proclamation of the good news of the love of God in Jesus Christ.

### **3. The Evangelizer ought himself to have had an experience of being saved in Jesus Christ**

In reality, how could I be a carrier of this divine fire if it is not burning within myself as a missionary? It's impossible. That would be the blind leading the blind. So that's why St Vincent declares: *Now if it be true that we are called to bear the love of God into all parts, if we are obliged to set the hearts of men on fire with it, ought not our own souls to burn with this divine fire! .....How shall we communicate it to others if we do not possess it ourselves?* (XII, 263).

Now, St Vincent knows what he is talking about when he is announcing the good news of being saved in Jesus Christ, when he's speaking of his love and of the charity which comes from God and spreads out to the neighbour. We know that, in the midst of a situation of personal crisis and spiritual distress, Vincent experienced the salvation which is brought about by Jesus Christ. At a certain moment his life was transformed and was opened up to God and to the neighbour through a total self-giving. That was what could

be called his conversion. We have a general grasp of the what took place. Let us just recall that for several years his life had been centred on himself. He had been seeking material possessions and social success, running after ecclesiastical benefices and personal advantages which he would achieve by keeping up contact with influential people. But this brought him only emptiness and disillusion. So much so that to escape from it he sought a spiritual director, M de Bã´rulle. This period was brought to its conclusion through a long and painful spiritual crisis during which he experienced doubts about the very foundations of his faith. It was a dark night which lasted about four years while he was in the de Gondi household. All the acts of mortification and charity which he could make failed to drive away his doubts. Abelly tells us that *he wrote out the creed on a paper which he placed next to his heart specifically as a remedy against the evil he was experiencing; and, uttering a general disavowal of all thoughts against faith, he made a pact with our Lord that each time he would put his hand on his heart and on this paper he willed to renounce the temptation even though he did not pronounce a single word* (Abelly 1, 167). A short time before the Folleville event, so it seems, St Vincent made the vow to consecrate all his life to the love of the Lord in the service of the poor. That is when, again Abelly tells us, *that all the suggestions of the evil spirit were dissipated and passed away. His heart which had been under oppression for so long found itself brought back into a gentle freedom, and his soul was filled with such abundant light that he declared on several occasions that he seemed to see the truths of the faith with a very special clarity* (Abelly 1,167).

In that happening, St Vincent had a profound experience of the presence of Jesus Christ and of the salvation which he brings. This transformed his life and was to remain with him. He passed from darkness into light, from oppression into liberty, from the anguish of doubt into the joy and the brightness of faith. He passed from a life centred on himself to a life completely given over to God and the poor. From then on he knew through experience and no longer through mere teaching that Christ is the saviour and that he is present in daily life right through into eternity. Christ was now a loving and life-giving presence. He was able to proclaim this with force and with power.

It would be good if each one of us asked ourself this question: what is my personal experience of salvation through Jesus Christ that can be the basis for my proclaiming that he is alive and the source of life and of love? Is my proclamation based on hear-say or on experience?

#### **4. Transmitting an understanding of the faith**

Henceforth St Vincent is burning with this *divine fire* which drives him towards the poor. With it he can set hearts on fire. He can go about proclaiming Jesus Christ. In his simple talks with people he can find the right words to touch the hearts and inflame them with faith and love. We don't have a transcript of what Saint Vincent said about Christ in catechism lessons; but in speaking to his missionaries he finds himself opening his heart to stimulate their faith and their love of the Lord, as in the conference of 30 May 1659: *Let us turn our eyes to the Son of God. Oh, what a charitable heart! What flames of love! My Jesus, say to us, please, a little of what has drawn you from heaven that you*

*should come and suffer the maledictions of the earth, with so much persecution and so many torments? O fountain of love, humbled to our level and even to the punishment of a slave! In all that, who has shown more love for the neighbour than yourself? O Saviour, you came to expose yourself to all our miseries, to take the form of a sinner, to lead a life of suffering and to endure an ignominious death for us! Could there be a love comparable to this? Who could love with such surpassing affection? Who but our Lord, enamoured as he was of creatures to such a degree, as to leave his Father's throne and come and take a body subject to infirmity? And for what reason? In order to establish amongst us, by his example and his words, charity towards the neighbour. This love it was that crucified him and produced the admirable work of our redemption (XII, 264, 265).*

As a result of this personal experience of Jesus Christ he was able to develop a whole lively catechesis on God and on Christ the saviour as well as on other aspects of the faith, making these understandable through the use of familiar wording and simple discussion. Let us remember that in the catechism lessons the missionary used to explain the principal mysteries of the faith (the Trinity, the Incarnation and the Eucharist), as well as the commandments of God, the creed and the Our Father. The missionary thus gave an overall view of the fundamental aspects of the faith, presenting a vast synthesis to nourish people's spirits as well as to touch their hearts.. Missioners, St Vincent said, will do this all the better for always continuing to listen to God who will inspire their words. *They ought, in speaking to them, he said, lift up their minds to God to receive from him what they ought to say to them. Because God is an inexhaustible source of wisdom, light and love. It is from him we should draw forth what we say to others (XII, 15).*

This doctrinal teaching in the "catechism-lessons" was completed during the day by the "preaching" which treated mainly of moral matters. Every aspect of personal, family and social life was touched on so that conversion would affect all the concrete areas of life and not simply remain an affective love of God; because it would be very suspect if it neglected an effective love which would serve poor and sick brothers and sisters. *Let us love God, my brothers, let us love God! But let it be through the strength of our arms and the sweat of our brows. For, very often so many acts of love of God, of devotion, of well-wishing and other similar affections and interior movements of a tender heart, although very good and desirable, are nevertheless very suspect when they fail to lead into the practice of effective love (XI, 40).* As for St Vincent himself, he cannot be suspected of taking refuge in an abstract spirituality. Why? Because he had such a feel for concrete involvement in the service of the neighbour, and such an ability to link together love of God and love of one's neighbour, proclamation of Jesus Christ and material service of the poor. He invites us to do the same.

So what about ourselves today? What proclamation are we making of Jesus Christ who died and rose and is our saviour? What understanding of faith for today's world are we putting forth? Do we feel at ease about proclaiming the kerygma, the centre of our faith, like the apostles on Pentecost Day? What difficulties do we experience with regard to the people we are evangelising? And what are the resistances which we can detect in ourselves?

We shall be continuing our reflexions shortly by listening to the Irish mission team who will talk to us about proclaiming the message of Jesus Christ in the cultural context of their country.

Stanislaus Brindley CM, translator

# **The Proclamation Of And Conversion To The Message Of Jesus Christ**

*Vincentian Mission Team in Ireland*

*Rev Jay Shanahan C.M., Rev Paul Roche C.M.  
Rev Jim Sheil C.M., Rev Paschal Scallan C.M.  
Mrs Maureen Treanor, Sr. Alice Daly D.C.*

## **Preface:**

The editor of a national newspaper, "The Irish Times" once wrote, "*...To appreciate Ireland, you must understand the priorities of the Irish people. Religion is not the most important characteristic. No! The priorities are land, religion and culture....*"

To apply the kerygmatic message of Jesus Christ to Irish religious faith, one has to begin with history. Therefore, the aim of this paper is

Part 1: To trace the shifts in Irish society and the evangelical responses by Irish Vincentians. (Context)

Part 2: To outline an emerging Ireland, the separation of church and state, and the struggles facing a changing nation. (Confrontation)

Part 3: An analysis of theological insights and our attempts to respond to those insights in a practical way. (Challenge)

Part 4: To summarize recent developments and a new approach through "The Ember Team." (Collaboration)

Part 5: To summarize a theology of mission for 2000, offer some reflections on signs of hope and a conclusion. (Charter)

## **Part 1: The historical context**

### **1.1. Ireland - The Colonial Factor**

Ireland was colonized for 800 years. After the Reformation, the Catholic religion was central to the Irish identity. English and Scottish farmers and landlords controlled Irish land and Irish affairs for most of that time. As Ireland was a colony, Irish Catholicism reinforced Irish identity. Priests had to study in Paris, Rome and Salamanca.

In 1829, an Act of Parliament provided for Catholic Emancipation. This enabled the Hierarchy to establish an era of development and organization. Marked growth began in the Irish church as parishes became established. *What is central to Irish Catholicism is that, historically, the Irish Catholic always had a cause to fight for.*

## **1.2. The Vincentian Community - Mission Expansion and Decline in the 19th Century**

In 1833, a group of Irishmen organized themselves for the purpose of evangelization. Some years later, they wrote to Paris and sought to be a part of the worldwide Vincentian community. In this way, the Irish Vincentian community was founded independently from the Congregation on the continent.

The Irish Vincentians gave their first mission in 1842. From the 1840's-1880 Vincentians and Jesuits (later joined by Redemptorists and others) were engaged in very successful Parish Missions. Their aims were:

- a. to establish the parish structures throughout the country,
- b. to counter the proselytizing campaigns of protestant denominations,
- c. to regularize marriages,
- d. to established a sacramental life for the people.

The Irish Vincentians diversified their apostolate to offer formal education and the spiritual formation of clergy - but they continued to conduct parish missions. By 1859, the Irish Vincentians had established 4 central mission houses, Ireland (2), England (1), Scotland(1).

By the 1880's Church structures were established. The decline of the Mission Teams is traced to this time. Parish Missions became more devotional, less directly evangelical and less catechetical. As a result, the leading role of the Vincentians in parish missions was taken over by the Jesuits, Redemptorists, Passionists and others.

## **1.3. The Centrality of Catholic Church in 20th Century Ireland (1920-1960's)**

By 1921, the Church had taken a central place in the life of the country. The Constitution of 1937 enshrined the "special" place of the Catholic Church "as the religion of the vast majority of the Irish population". Education and Health care were administered by large communities of Religious. In both cases they had become involved long before the Government had any such concerns.

Large numbers of vocations, sodalities and confraternities were also evident. An era of establishment of Vincent de Paul Society and the Legion of Mary had been reached. The Irish church was therefore central to any debate surrounding issues of social justice, health, education... the Irish Catholic church was of enormous relevance to Irish society - and the Irish Vincentians had established themselves in the training of teachers for primary schools, some secondary schools and Irish seminaries - in addition to parish missions.

## **Part 2: Emerging Ireland: Church and State: Confrontation**

### **2.1. Ireland: 1960-1970's**

Several factors shaped the cultural and moral landscape of Ireland in the last 30 years. The most significant were:

- a. The "Free Education Act" of the 1960's. Now, for the first time, formal education was freely available to all young people up to the age of 18.
- b. The arrival of television (1961) - we were less and less an island people.
- c. Economic policy, the stemming of emigration and Ireland's entry to the EEC (1973).

With new found confidence, trade unions and government gradually began to exert administrative control over those bodies that were formerly the domain of religious bodies. A dramatic reduction in vocations meant that religious had little option but to hand over control of both educational and medical institutions. The role of the priest as the conscience of the nation was evaporating.

## **2.2. Ireland: 1980-1990's**

Since the mid 1980's the teaching of the church in Ireland has been consistently challenged by government and EU policy and has met with considerable opposition from the media. But other factors too have rocked the credibility of the church in Ireland. Some of these are

- a. the impact of materialist-secular thinking,
- b. a well-educated population,
- c. a high level of unemployment and considerable disillusionment,
- d. a loss of control in management of schools,
- e. "Vatican Two" thinking has, in many parishes never been seriously implemented,
- f. a referendum in 1995 on constitutional divorce in which 70% of the electorate voted - and was approved by 51% of those who voted. For the first time, church policy was defeated at the polling booths. The concept of separation of church and state was now crystallized in our legislation.

Consequently, parishes now provide Masses and sacraments - and very little more. Our obsession with "sacramental maintenance" meant that we neglected the cultivation of Evangelization. Sadly, scandals among clergy have compounded our problems in ministry. The public perception of the church is a sign of confusion rather than a sign of hope. Many good people have found in the institutional church no place to lay their heads... and have slipped away without ever saying "goodbye".

So what are the new images of Church in modern Ireland? They may well be summarized as follows:

- a. Evangelization in Ireland is only a felt need in the last 15 years.
- b. A sense of increased alienation - the church is perceived to be more and more middle-class - and even there it is withering.
- c. Changes seem to be made only because they have to be.
- d. No sense of excitement and being led by a creative Spirit - we have become a "valley of dry bones".

### **2.3. The Residue - New Emerging Voices**

Many of the issues that people will discuss are centered on the collapse of vocations to the priesthood. But there are other areas of debate that we fail to address. These are the "emerging voices" who may be summed up as follows:

- a. Reflective women who are not attracted to a church which has proved itself slow to accept failure for indiscretions of the past and criticisms of the present,
- b. Groups of people whose way of living does not adhere to the officially sanctioned patterns of sexual behavior and who effectively feel excluded from the church,
- c. A yawning gulf between youth pop-culture and perceived stagnant adulthood,
- d. Liturgy is detached from life - as culture and Catholicism drift further apart, many will utter in weary fashion - why bother?

### **2.4. A New Church - a Community rather than an Institution**

Already a new church is emerging in Ireland. It reflects many of the following characteristics:

- a. It is more community based, less dependent on institutions or education as vehicles of control and order.
- b. There is a greater sense of people choosing to belong.
- c. Far more participation, less clerical domination.
- d. More concerned with needs and problems of society.
- e. Less occupied with "self-preservation" and a "perfect society".
- f. More prayerful, less dogmatic.
- g. More scripturally nourished, less centered on the sacraments.
- h. More trusting of women and the young.
- i. More given to listening than dictating.

It is to such a church that we, as a mission team need to direct our energy and expertise - and such a model of church has been the foundation on which we have reshaped our mission team in Ireland.

### **2.5. Why A New Model of Mission?**

This new model of mission is being developed to address the signs of the times. In Ireland these are:

- a. The spread of a "New Enlightenment" in Western Europe. How do we respond?
- b. The growth in technology and the Internet. How can it be harnessed?
- c. A new culture, economic policy and legislation which need a fresh theology.
- d. A recognition that traditional devotion which has waned or disappeared needs to be expressed - we need to ritualize this reality.

- e. Growth in concept of informed conscience - can we create space for "Nicodemus's" - those who seeks to deepen their faith by stepping out of inherited conventions and pursue a new form of faith expression in their relationship with God?
- f. Evaporation of the God of retribution - so where do we find our God now?
- g. A people who believe they are well on the way to "having it all" and do not wish to listen?

### **Part 3: Responding to the call: challenge**

#### **3.1. New Initiatives for Mission**

##### ***a. Vatican II and The "Village Fountain":***

The Church is the People of God - everyone has a part to play. Many people in the church have still not fully assimilated its meaning into their lives. There is an ever increasing need for Adult Faith Formation/Development and this must take place at local level....

Pope John XXIII gave us a vision of Parish as the "Village Fountain" where all would have recourse to their thirst. It is in and through the Parish that people experience what it is to be church, a part of the Body of Christ.

##### ***b. 1980: Popular Parish Missions:***

A radical step at Evangelization in the Irish province - *specialization* became a key characteristic in the members of our teams as a new team was established.

##### ***c. 1983: Bogota:***

- i. Calls for a Congregation which would reflect a pilgrim theology in our willingness to go from place to place in the work of evangelization.
- ii. Collaboration with clergy and laity.
- iii. Call to serve the "more abandoned" and to promote justice.

##### ***d. 1989: Christifideles Laici:***

"It is necessary that in the life of faith, all rediscover the true meaning of the parish, that is, the place where the very `mystery' of the Church is present and at work,.... The parish is not principally a structure, a territory, or a building but rather `the family of God, a fellowship afire with the unifying spirit' a familial and welcoming home, the community of the faithful."

##### ***e. 1990-95: A Collaborative Approach to Urban Parish Mission***

The aim of this new approach was to aim at a model of mission that would foster the development in parishes of small groups centered around a common purpose - liturgy, spirituality, education, social, etc. - which would express a new way of being parish.

### 3.2. A New Approach: Pre-Mission, Mission-Event, Post Mission

#### a. *Pre-Mission: Proclamation*

- i. Mission Team preach at all the Masses in advance of the "Mission Event"
- ii. Public meeting, (optional) survey of needs of parish, chaired by lay person
- iii. Structuring of various committees to undertake the task of mission
- iv. Preparation Week-ends (each member of Vincentian team takes responsibility for the formation of parish teams prior to mission event. Other parishes who have experienced a parish mission help the parishes in their preparations also.

#### b. *Mission Event (One or two weeks of a mission event)*

##### Week 1: "Outreach Week"

- i. Geared partly to those who, no longer worship in local churches.
- ii. Located in halls, homes, even pubs - wherever people meet.
- iii. Activities vary - may have prayer sharing/scriptural/educational or purely recreational dimension - dependent on work done by groups in advance.
- iv. We offer ideas, tell them of what others did and encourage them.

##### Week 2: "Gathering Week"

- i. Celebrated in church
- ii. Emphasis on preaching, liturgical expression/sacramental lives of people
- iii. Drama, mime, a variety of speakers and voices from various sectors of the community feature this week in addition to the missionaries.

*Conclusion: These two weeks were eventually conflated into one week in response to our experience of parish mission where it was felt that two weeks were "confusing" and could not be sustained.*

#### c. *Post-Mission*

Some parishes undertook a process of follow-up to the mission-event.

- i. Parish Evaluation with a skilled facilitator from outside of parish.
- ii. The formation of a Pastoral Council.
- iii. Lay ministry educational programs in the parish.
- iv. Further study of lay ministry or a degree in theology at All Hallows.

*In Ireland, there is little difference between the local and universal Church. It is the local Church which touches them in a real and tangible way, particularly in the "Key Life Moments" and celebrations such as Births, Marriages and Deaths. One of the goals of*

*parish mission is to bring to awareness the reality of a universal church - this is the philosophy in which much of this model is grounded.*

#### **Part 4: Maintenance, task and "the ember team": collaboration**

In September 1994, Maureen Treanor joined our team of three priests. After many missions involving different non-ordained people, Maureen, a married woman and mother of five children worked with us for that year on a part-time basis. In September 1995, Maureen commenced a three year term as a full-time member of our team. This move was prophetic. With a provincial plan that would seek to expand the presence of more non-ordained members on our team, and the addition, in 1996, of a Daughter of Charity, we felt the need to change our approach - and our image - from that of a team of ordained Vincentian priests to a collaborative team of men and women, some of whom are ordained. It was time to look to create a new image.

In years past, the open fire was a familiar sight in every Irish home. One of the family would get up in the morning, rake over the embers of the fire from the night before, draw them together and a new fire would be generated as a new day would begin. For us, this image was the most appropriate symbol of our task. The bonfires of Irish faith have diminished, but in our work we frequently encounter pockets of faith that are waiting to be nurtured. Our task, in a time of mission is to draw these embers together and set a fire which will draw together those who feel the cold of isolation and discouragement.

We now approach our ministry at two distinct levels - Team (Maintenance) and Task. This has helped us achieve much greater unity and clarity of vision, in the present climate of confusion. Our decisions are made as a team and we have acquired the assistance of an outside facilitator for the purposes of achieving a "team identity" and clarifying our task (what are we trying to do?).

The goals of the Ember Team are a theological and pastoral development of the models of evangelization we have inherited. Those aims are:

1. A personal experience of a liberating, loving and merciful God.
2. A deeper awareness of the Holy Spirit in our lives.
3. A greater involvement in caring for those within and beyond our community, especially those who feel isolated from the community because of their situation.

A significant thrust in our development has been the shifting of emphasis from a *sacramental basis* to an *evangelical basis* as the "raison d'être" of our apostolate. The "Open Sessions", informal gatherings within a week of mission have proved to be an area that continues to generate tremendous enthusiasm. From these sessions, the seeds of follow-up are sown.

Our future as a province has to be questioned. We have no students and have not had an ordination since 1991. Nigeria will become an independent province soon. Excluding Nigerian confreres, we have 100 confreres - 14 are under 50 years of age - two are under 35. The future may seem dark - yet we are called to be children of light. And the light of truth is that we are called to be faithful to our charism - to communicate the compassionate love of Jesus Christ to those in need. Vincent de Paul saw that need and began setting up structures

that would foster the spiritual growth of each individual. And the work of the Ember Team is yet another channel of his charism and the grace of God's Holy Spirit.

## **Part 5: a theology of mission for 2000: charter**

### **5.1. New Definitions of Mission**

*A Mission is a time of opportunity for everyone involved in Parish*

- i. to grow in awareness of the gift of Baptism,
- ii. to identify our gifts and talents which can be used in building community,
- iii. to explore different visions of Parish and a life-long journey of faith.

*Within a time of Mission,*

- i. the compassionate healing of Jesus Christ is ritualized in word and action,
- ii. from which stems the development and growth of special groups,
- iii. where we may share with one other the peace, joy and hope given us by the Holy Spirit.

*A Mission can foster*

- i. a growing number of support-type groups,
- ii. a ministry of "like to like" - we have something to share with others,
- iii. events that need to be cultivated in a parish setting and so engender a deeper sense of belonging.

### **5.2. Signs Of The Times - Signs Of Hope**

- a. The problems facing the church in Ireland today, surfaced in many European countries during the 1960's and '70's. This is a significant advantage to us.
- b. We have an increasing number of lay people interested in, and trained in Theology and related skills.
- c. While we complain about the inactivity of the institutional church, many people have a faith, strong enough to sustain roles of community leadership.

### **Conclusion:**

Ireland has never been a stranger to poverty. But the poverty of contemporary Irish Catholicism is the loss of sight - the ability to see the center ground. Those of the extreme left call for total freedom in an age of economic prosperity, those to the extreme right seek a Christian fascism that smacks of intolerance while many of those in the center utter in a bewildered fashion the words of Mary Magdalene "...they have taken away my Lord and I do not know where they have put him." What we strive to bring to parish life is an awareness of the ground of true encounter between Jesus and each of us.

The metaphor of the "Ember Team" is a providential one. The ground of encounter that once was a blazing fire of Irish Catholicism has died. Yet in our experience, there still are many embers of hope. (We have forgotten what our primitive ancestors knew so well).

Our goal is to draw together the embers and once more encourage a fire of confidence and assurance, a fire that will give light to our eyes, joy to our hearts and hope to our souls. We have taken for our motto the words of St. Paul to Timothy "Fan Into A Flame The Gift of God". Such is our understanding of our Vincentian charism as we strive to communicate the kerygmatic message of conversion to Jesus Christ on the threshold of a new millennium.

# Morality and conversion

*by Kevin Rafferty, C.M.*

## **Introduction**

I have been asked to speak about the moral aspects of conversion, keeping in mind theological, scriptural, pastoral and Vincentian aspects of this theme. In engaging in this reflection, it is possible to take different starting points:

- a) We could begin with reflection on conversion in our own lives. What kind of conversion(s) have we experienced? If we preach to others about conversion and indeed if we seek to help them to be converted, there is no doubt that our own moments of conversion will play a very big part in how we do this.
- b) Or, we could start with one of the great biblical paradigms of conversion - the Parable of the Prodigal Son - and examine what went on in that turning point when the Prodigal Son began to have "second thoughts" about what he had done. Questions about the blinding effect of sin, the gradual turning around, the homecoming etc. are all there to be examined.
- c) Or, we could begin with one or other of the classic examples of conversion in the Christian tradition - Augustine, Francis of Assisi, Ignatius Loyola, Blaise Pascal, Edith Stein, Paul Claudel, Simone Weil... and why not Vincent de Paul, I can hear you say.

There is no doubt that any of the above starting points could be helpful and useful to us and I am sure that in our reflections today, our own experience, the Gospel paradigm and examples of saints whose example has influenced each one of us will weave in and out of our reflections and discussions.

But just to keep our reflections rooted in our present reality and the present context of parish missions, I want to begin with the experience of conversion of Angela, Tony and Jimmy, three people Paul Roche met with recently on our Parish Missions in Ireland.

## **Angela**

*- a highly spirited mother of four children, the youngest of whom, Caroline, is autistic and attends a special school Monday to Friday. Her husband, Dermot, abandoned her and went to England with another woman. Angela now works, as a cleaner in the local High School. Ten months ago Tommy, who is separated from his wife, moved in with Angela and the children. He loves them and things have looked up a lot ever since. Angela was very upset with the way the Church treated her when Dermot abandoned her, she felt no one cared. She still prays and often goes into the Church to light a candle, but admits she is not very regular at Sunday Mass, as she has been told she can't receive Communion. During Lent last year there was a mission in the parish. Angela got involved with the women's group, making tea for the discussion groups which were held each evening. She felt very much part of things. One evening there was a talk and video about the effect on children of the*

*Chernobyl disaster. Along with five other women, Angela volunteered to take two children from Belarus for a 6-week holiday. Since then she has collected money, attended talks and has become totally committed. "I can now see that my religion is about helping those who are less well off than I am" she says. Once a week she gathers people in her home and they spend an hour sharing the Gospel together. "That mission made all the difference to me - thank God I took part."*

## **Tony**

*- is in his third year in Dublin City University, where he is a student of Business Administration. His parents are tremendously proud of him getting into University. His father, who drives the No. 19 bus, was always determined that all seven children would do better. Tony was his pride and joy. Many of the students in college found Tony rather insufferable. Noisy and pushy, he got in with a crowd who spent most of their time and money drinking. Unlike his hardworking father who never misses Mass and is Vincent de Paul Society President, Tony had no real roots in the faith and quickly drifted away. (Lk 8:13). He dabbled in New Age stuff, but mainly was cynical toward "wets" who went to Church. Tony was on the edge of a group who regularly took drugs. With so many others, he was stunned when first year student, Sandra, died after taking Ecstasy at a student hop. The Church, usually not crowded, was packed for Sandra's funeral. It was no ordinary funeral either. Apart from the Chaplain who said the Mass, Danny spoke. He briefly told his story - he had found Jesus and seemed to radiate joy and peace. He invited students to a weekend experience. From the crowded Church just four went along a month later. Tony was one. It changed him greatly. "I've been a Catholic for 22 years, but have known Jesus only for one." Now he prays a great deal, generally carries a Bible with him, frowns on those who drink and is planning to go to Uganda next summer to preach to young groups there. His father is a little confused... "I thought he was going to become a business man, not a bleedin' monk."*

## **Jimmy**

*- a bit of a character, has lived all his 54 years on Pearse Road. The four children are grown up and married - all have fled the nest, have done well and seldom visit grubby Pearse Road. The past three years Jimmy has been made redundant by the multi-national chemical factory on the industrial estate. Within weeks of losing his job, Jimmy's wife of over 30 years died, leaving him alone with his "lump sum" redundancy payment. Like many around him, Jimmy took to drinking. In his drinking Jimmy became morose; hurts which he had carried for years began to surface. People tired of him and his self-pity. He took less and less care of himself. His clothes, like the house, were dirty and shabby. Religion didn't feature too much in Jimmy's life at this time, though he kept the lamp burning before the Sacred Heart in the kitchen and sometimes had a word with "Himself." The word sometimes became an argument - what really hurt Jimmy was that no one seemed to give a damn for him now that the good woman was gone. He was never too sure how he ended up in the Parochial Hall that night, but Jimmy was there for an Open AA meeting. The stories were routine for most present, but for Jimmy it was*

*magic. "My life is out of control." "I must rely on the Higher Power:" It all made sense to Jimmy. "My name is Jimmy. I'm an alcoholic." Not a single day has passed since that night but Jimmy was at "his meeting." He has remained sober, he gives thanks to God day by day, but mostly in his home, not at Mass.<sup>1</sup>*

## **1. Moral conversion - what is it?**

I think we would all agree that at the center of Angela's, Tony's and Jimmy's conversion experiences is a new kind of awareness of themselves, of their relationships with others and of their relationship with God. We could say that they have arrived at a new kind of insight into their situation. It is a new kind of knowledge or a new kind of consciousness. They see their situations differently.

And what is very important to grasp in all of this is that knowledge in the moral sphere is more than knowledge.

*"I do not see values as I see things.  
I only see those values I am willing to serve."*

Knowledge in the moral sphere is a special kind of knowledge. In the history of moral philosophy, one of the great turning points in Greek Philosophy was the realization that knowledge as such does not equal morality. Because I know what I should do does not mean that I am going to do it.

- Knowledge cannot be equated with virtue.
- Intellectual conversion cannot be equated with Moral Conversion.

And the reason is because in the sphere of moral conversion the whole person is involved, one's intellect, yes, but also one's emotions, one's feelings and above all, one's will.

In evaluating what we should do or not do in the moral sphere we usually ask:

- What does my conscience tell me I should do?
- What do you think of the following description of conscience:

*Conscience - an inner voice that we experience as nagging, hinting, suggesting, as well as vetoing - against the conscious direction of our wills and sometimes in spite of ingenious arguments concocted in our own favour. We must all of us have sometimes experienced that sudden "dawn" of a new consciousness that we have been behaving badly in some respect. In such situations we are confronted against our will with the truth which we at first dimly perceive and then clearly recognize. The thinking may have been going on for some time. All that is needed is a fiat of our wills for the new moral awareness to break through.<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup>I am grateful to Fr. Paul Roche, a member of the Irish Province Parish Mission Team, for these three account of "conversion" experiences.

<sup>2</sup>Francis Dunlop, "Moral Education," lecture to members of the St. Thomas More Society, St. Mary's College of Education, Strawberry Hill, London, March 1982.

At the heart of our preaching and every thing else we do on our parish missions is a desire to lead people to a conversion - a moral conversion - "the slow dawning of a new consciousness, a new awareness of themselves, of others and of God."

I can hear some of you say is all this not obvious. Is it not common sense? Maybe it is, but it is extraordinary how many people today equate conversion with the acquisition of knowledge. I suspect, indeed I am fairly sure of it, that much of the New Age phenomenon which we encounter in so many different contexts today sees moral awareness as just one kind of knowledge amongst others. A special kind of knowledge, yes, but it is more than knowledge. It involves my emotions, my feelings, my will.

I think that a great strength of the Catholic tradition is that we have an awareness of our capacity for self-delusion, for self-deception, the need for moral purification in order to discover what my real values are and indeed to know what is right and what is wrong.

And I often think that the large number of people who still turn out for ashes on Ash Wednesday is an acknowledgement of this. The conversion we are looking for demands effort and takes time, it involves struggle and soul searching if it is a genuine kind of conversion.

## **2. Kerygma precedes catechesis, especially moral catechesis**

Many of you may already be saying to yourselves that it is not moral conversion in any philosophical sense that I should be addressing, but conversion - moral conversion - in a religious context. It is not conversion following the path of the philosopher, Socrates, but conversion following the call of Jesus Christ to "Come Follow Me."

I can only agree with you. Those of us who belong to an older generation studied moral theology when it was separated to a greater or lesser extent from Systematic or Dogmatic Theology. So much has happened in the past 30 years to follow through on re-thinking the basis of moral theology, especially in rooting it in scripture. You will recall what the Vatican II Document on the training of Priests (*Optatam Totius*) said:

*Theological disciplines should be renewed by livelier contact with the Mystery of Christ and the history of salvation. Special attention needs to be given to moral theology. It's scientific exposition should be more thoroughly nourished by scriptural teaching. It should show the nobility of the Christian vocation.*  
(Par 16).

When one examines the moral teaching of the New Testament writings, one discovers that one never finds moral catechesis in isolation. In the Synoptic Gospels, in the Pauline writings and in the Johannine writings, one discovers that the context of any kind of moral teaching, especially teaching on conversion, is the proclamation of the Kerygma. And of course we find great variation in the presentation of the Kerygma as one goes from one set of New Testament writings to another. Let me give a few examples:

### **A) *The Kingdom of God is at hand:***

One of the earliest presentations of moral catechesis is found in Mark 1:14 (Parallel Texts Mt 4:12-17, Lk 4:14-15).

"Jesus went into Galilee.  
There he proclaimed the Good News from God.  
'The time has come' he said,  
'and the Kingdom of God is close at hand.  
Repent,  
and believe the Good News."

There is an air of expectation among the people listening to Jesus. Jesus speaks to their hopes and dreams and anxieties and he would have known that there were different expectations among them about the Kingdom he was referring to (as there is today when we proclaim the coming of the Kingdom).

- The Pharisees codified it as if it could have been programmed.
  - The Zealots tried to externalize it politically.
- The Qumranites see the Kingdom as judgment on the gentiles and sinners.
- The apocryphists see the Kingdom as bringing catastrophe.
  - The Rabbis spiritualize the Kingdom into an interior piety.<sup>3</sup>

For Jesus the Kingdom is different to all these expectations. For Jesus, the Kingdom is a gift - a gift of the Father to be responded to with gratitude and thanksgiving.

I will not go into all the different views we have about the interpretation of "the Kingdom is close at hand" - what we call eschatology. It will suffice to say that Jesus' call for metanoia, for conversion, for repentance is a call to repentance in the context of the 1st and 2nd Coming of Christ. We are living in these "in between times" and if we are to respond to Jesus' call, we undergo a total change of heart and mind and become disciples of Christ. The call is a call to radical discipleship.

The full implications of this call to repentance and to discipleship are spelt out in the Sermon on the Mount. The Beatitudes, the Old Law and the New Law contrasted and the call to almsgiving, interior prayer etc., are requirements on all of us who struggle to belong to the Kingdom. And for all of you who have studied the Sermon on the Mount, you know how far we have moved from any kind of legalism, minimalism or a morality with a pass and honours course. But you know as well as I do that there is always the danger of regressing to any one of these in our time and in every age in our presentation of the Christian ethic.

#### B) *The Paschal Mystery - The Cornerstone of Christian Morality:*

When we move to the Pauline writings we find a different way of presenting the Kerygma and moral catechesis. For example, if you look at Romans 6:1-12, you will find that Paul fuses together three kinds of Death and Resurrection:

- The Death and Resurrection of Christ.
- Our Baptism in the Death and Resurrection of Christ.
- Dying to sin and living in the new life of Christ.

The context of moral catechesis is the Paschal Mystery.

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<sup>3</sup>From Scripture Notes of Fr. Brian M. Nolan, All Hallows College, Dublin.

C) *Love others as I have loved you:*

And when we move to the Johannine writings we find yet another way of presenting the Kerygma and the catechesis:

*"I have given you a new commandment  
You must love others as I have loved you."*

And our efforts to live the moral life are a response to Jesus' love for us. It could not be put more succinctly.

## **Conclusion**

In the New Testament writings, we cannot separate the Kerygma from the moral catechesis. The examples we have given show how closely they are related in some of the key texts in the New Testament writings.

The Christian ethic is a very demanding ethic. It only makes sense when we see the overall context:

- The context of the proclamation of a Kingdom in the Synoptics.
  - The context of the saving death and resurrection in Paul's letter to the Romans.
- The context of agape in the Johannine writings.

When we move to some of the more specific teachings of Jesus about the unity and dissolubility of marriage, about sharing our goods with others, especially the poor, we have to contextualise these teachings or better still, we have to make sure that our hearers realize the context in which Jesus spoke, Paul spoke or wrote, the Johannine writers spoke or wrote. In the context in which many of us proclaim the ethical teaching of Jesus today, it is not that surprising that many people will reject it, or see it as beyond them.

Perhaps it is only in the context of a Christian Community in which the Commandment to love one another is really alive and in the context of a sacramental life in which we are nourished by the Word, by the Eucharist that this ethic makes some sense and people will feel empowered to try and live up to it.

## **3.Kohlberg's stages of moral development**

When St. Vincent de Paul and his companions gave missions in the 17th Century, it would be true to say that what we know as the empirical sciences - psychology, sociology - were non-existent, or certainly at a very embryonic stage of development. So when we engage in this fundamental reflection on "popular missions" today and what form they should take, we cannot leave out of account some of the findings of the empirical sciences.

It would be true to say that our understanding of the nature of guilt has been sharpened and refined by the various theories of Freud and Jung and their followers today. It will be important that we address some of the implications of all this when we reflect on the place of the Sacrament of Penance in the dynamic of conversion.

What I would like to explore with you now are the implications of the findings of an educational psychologist, Lawrence Kohlberg, in what he has written about Stages of Moral Development. Most of you, I am sure, are familiar with the theory itself. He distinguishes six stages at three levels of development:

- i) The pre-conventional level
  - Stage 1: Obedience and punishment orientation.
  - Stage 2: Instrumental/relativistic orientation.

Kohlberg claims that the six-stage sequence is universal and he makes this claim in the light of empirical research he has gathered in USA, England, Turkey, Taiwan, etc. He also claims that the six-stage theory is invariant - one must progress through the stages in order. One cannot pass to a higher stage without passing through the stage immediately preceding it. Moral Development takes place according to a predetermined sequence. The task of the moral educator is to lead the person on to the next stage to the one he/she is at right now.<sup>4</sup>

COMMENT:

Various critiques of this six-stage theory have been put forward by other educational psychologists. How universal are the stages? Might there be more than six stages? How invariant is the sequence? and so on. As you will know, contemporary moral theologians have taken the theory quite seriously, despite reservations on one or other point.

Does this theory not point up strengths and weaknesses in the way we present the Christian ethic in a Catholic context?

One of the strengths I believe of the Catholic approach to morality is that we do present a body of moral teaching with authority. One of the great achievements of Pope John Paul II is to have spoken out boldly on the morality of many issues in our day, in biomedical ethics, in social ethics, in sexual ethics etc. The expectation is that people will listen to a moral authority whose credentials can be vouchsafed. Catholics are expected to listen to this authority and be guided by it.

One of the weaknesses of our approach to morality in the Catholic tradition is that we have very often stopped there. We have not gone on to the third level - Stages 5 & 6 - and encouraged Catholics to appropriate moral teachings for themselves and when they do, we find it very difficult to deal with them.

What is at stake here of course is the Primacy of the Individual Conscience and the danger that we just pay lip service to this. Part of our task is to encourage people to appropriate in a personal way the arguments we may put forward for a position and if we are dealing, as we are very often today, with people with full secondary and, more and more, university education, we cannot expect them merely to "conform" to the teaching of the Pope or Bishops or any other moral authority in the Catholic Church.

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<sup>4</sup>Cf. Bernard Haring, "Free and Faithful in Christ" in *General Moral Theology*, Vol. 1, 243.

A corollary to the above is to be realistic and not overestimate what people may be capable of. We know, from the results of Kohlberg's findings that not that many people are Stage 5 and Stage 6 people. Many people are looking for an authority they can trust and very often, in their difficulties about resolving a moral problem, they want the ear of someone who will listen to them patiently, someone who will encourage them to search for the true path to follow. There is all the difference in the world between a Laissez faire attitude, "anything goes" attitude, "make up your own mind" attitude and the attitude of encouraging people to engage in a serious and responsible search for the values that are really at stake in whatever moral dilemma may face them.

#### **4. Conversion and fundamental choice**

When we try to analyze and structure our moral experience, it is more than likely that we will invoke the key concepts of freedom, conscience, law and guilt/sin to do so. To do this is to look at the moral act from different standpoints or perspectives. For a few moments I would like to concentrate on our understanding of freedom and the way some of our contemporary moral theologians introduce what they will call The Theory of Fundamental Option or Fundamental Choice to help us have a better understanding of how we exercise our freedom.

It does not require very much knowledge of psychology, sociology, biology etc., to become aware of how many factors bear on the exercise of our freedom, factors which can limit or diminish our freedom. Many of our contemporaries will draw the conclusion that we are completely determined by instinctual forces in all that we do. Consequently, our sense of freedom is an illusion. At the end of the day, however, I believe that there are moments in our lives when we can transcend these pressures and make what moral theologians call "fundamental choices" or "fundamental options." Let me try to explain what they mean:

Through reflection on our own experience, we discover that the exercise of our freedom is more than the sum of the individual choices we make from day to day, from moment to moment. Beyond or deeper than the individual choices we make is an awareness of giving a general ethical orientation to our whole lives. We are responsible, not only for the individual things we do, we are responsible for the kind of people we are. We have the capacity of self-determination. We have the capacity of making fundamental choices.

We call it a *choice* because it is "I" ultimately who must decide what meaning to give to my life. I decide what will be the supreme value for me.

We call it a *fundamental* choice because it bears on the particular choices and decisions we make. A fundamental choice gives an ethical orientation to the whole of our lives - a positive orientation towards what is good and virtuous or a negative orientation towards what is evil and unauthentic.

Moral theologians vary in the way they describe this theory of fundamental choice:

- Josef Fuchs describes fundamental choice in terms of an exercise of a person's BASIC FREEDOM - a freedom that not only enables us to decide freely on particular acts and aims, but also by means of these to determine ourselves totally as persons and not merely in any particular area of behavior.
- Louis Janssens describes fundamental choice in more personalist terms - positively as a choice to be more selfless in one's relationship with others;

negatively as a choice to turn in on oneself - possessing, using and dominating others.

For a Christian of course, a fundamental choice will take on the modality of "opting for the Kingdom" or "following Christ."

It may not be that easy to define at any age of our lives the kind of fundamental choice we have made. There may be a "yes" more profound or more deeper than all our individual "no's" or a "no" more profound than all our individual "yes's." A friend of mine said to me once that she would need a thirty-day retreat with a good spiritual director and a good psychotherapist on hand to really determine the kind of fundamental choice she has made. I am not sure that it would be that difficult, but what is certain is that it would require serious reflection for a period of time for there to be "the dawning of a new consciousness" of what values we are really living for and I presume that this is the kind of reflection we are hoping to initiate in our proclamation of the kingdom in our parish missions.

*Some observations:*

If people are fixated on a distinction between mortal and venial sin and on confessing mortal sins according to their number and species, will they ever engage in the serious moral reflection about what their fundamental choice is? One way of making sure this does not happen is to preach as eloquently as we can about the mercy of God as the backdrop to any examination of conscience - as of course St. Vincent de Paul did.

One of the great merits of this theory of fundamental choice is that we move away from trivialising the moral life into a series of discrete acts unrelated to one another in which we play games about "staying out of mortal sin." Cf. David Lodge's novel, *How Far Can You Go?* Some of the excitement and adventure of living the moral life, especially living the moral life from a Christian perspective can take over.<sup>5</sup>

## **5. Ecclesial conversion - return to what kind of church?**

Some years ago I was visiting a parish in a place called Arlington, on the outskirts of Washington DC. After I had supper with the pastor, who happened to be a Scotsman, I was invited by him to attend a meeting of 20 parishioners which was taking place around 8 o'clock that evening. All the pastor told me was that it would be a meeting between ten active members of the parish and ten "inactive" Catholics who were exploring the idea of returning to active membership in that particular Christian Community. I cannot remember many details of the particular meeting itself, except that the meeting went on for about two hours, with a coffee break in between. What did remain in my mind was the easy informality and the willingness of the "inactive Catholics" to share their reasons for leaving the Church or their reservations about returning to active membership in the Church. The ten active Catholics had invited ten people they knew were alienated from the Church to come to a weekly meeting over 20 weeks to explore together reasons for leaving and reasons for returning. There was time for reconciliation and time for healing, as well as time to deepen their knowledge of Christ, of the Church as a group and on a one-to-one basis. This meeting was in fact the beginning of a movement in the States, known as Remembering Church, which I believe has much to teach us about Ecclesial Conversion, especially in the post Christian societies that many of us in the Western world belong to today.

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<sup>5</sup>David Lodge, *How Far Can You Go?* (Penguin Press, 1980).

When I reflected afterwards about what I had experienced that evening and read some of the literature associated with this Remembering Church Movement, I came to realise the following:

1. For a Catholic to return to the Church today after a prolonged absence cannot be squeezed into a rushed encounter with a priest in a darkened corner of a confessional. This does not do justice to the process itself nor the kind of Church we want to invite people back to.
2. In the light of what I heard that evening and discovered in subsequent discussion with the people running the sessions, I came to realize we need to distinguish carefully between the different kind of "alienation" that people today have to come to terms with if they are to return to active participation.<sup>6</sup>

In broad terms, we could distinguish between three different kinds of alienation:

A) *Alienation of the unawakened:*

*These are people who may have grown up in Catholic homes and may have gone to Catholic schools, but who have not really heard a first proclamation of the Gospel. One can hardly say that they are "estranged" from a God they have not yet discovered. They await a first hearing of the gospel. They may have been carrying a "membership" card in the Church, but have never really discovered what membership entails. It is not so much that many young people have left the Church. They never really belonged to it. And so what they are looking for is true enlightenment of what it means to be an adult Christian.*

B) True alienation:

*This is the alienation of people who once did belong but who deliberately walked away. They are looking for forgiveness, for reconciliation, for peace, for strengthening and for healing.*

C) Prophetic alienation

*This group claims that it is the Church for the local Christian Community that has failed them. Today this alienation may center on disagreement with the Church's teaching especially in the moral sphere, disagreement with the way authority is exercised in the Church, lack of respect for minority groups and so on.*

3. The process of "traveling" with people who want to explore "returning to the Church" is costly - it takes time, it takes great diplomacy, it calls for discernment. And of course, the best travel companions are those who have gone through the journey of return themselves. They are in a better position to understand where people are coming from and the stages of the journey home. I have heard it said that we may have much to learn from AA groups in setting up the process of returning.
4. The model of Church we are working out of, especially the understanding of Church as Community, will obviously play a key part in the kind of "conversion" process we are likely to set up. And of course, all this means that a Parish Mission Team has to

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<sup>6</sup>Cf. James Lopresti, "Penance: A reform. Proposal for the Rite," in *American Essays & Liturgy* 6 (Washington, DC: The Pastoral Press, 1987).

have some of the skills that will help ministers - priestly ministers and lay ministers - deepen the quality of Christian community in a local parish. Vincent found in the 17th Century that if there was to be follow through on parish missions in his day he had to engage in the renewal of parish structures and the renewal of men and women serving in these parishes. This is one of the reasons why giving parish missions today is so daunting, especially at a time when the Church is doing so much soul searching about both the nature of priestly ministry and the nature of lay ministry.

5. One thing that is central to setting up any process of "returning home" is an awareness that we are all penitents in need of forgiveness. An awareness on the part of all of what it is to be a sinner and what it is "to be forgiven" is central to our identity as Christians. How to bring a parish community to the point where it will rejoice in being a "reconciled community" and have a passionate desire to communicate this experience to others is somewhere at the heart of ecclesial conversion.

## **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

- 1) Give an example of a conversion experience or the "dawning of a new consciousness" that someone has recently shared with you.
- 2) In your preaching/communication on parish missions, what is your favourite scriptural paradigm of conversion?
- 3) In your country are there strengths and weaknesses in the way the Catholic Church communicates its moral teaching to our contemporaries?
- 4) Do you think that the theory of fundamental option has any bearing on the way we preach about conversion in the context of parish missions today?
- 5) Ecclesial conversion: what kind of Church would you like to be inviting people back to?

# Justice and Charity in the Mission

*Getulio Mota Grossi, C.M.*

We all know the warning of our holy founder: “If any among us should be of the opinion that they belong to the Congregation in order to preach the Gospel to the poor, but not to alleviate their distress, and to provide for their spiritual needs but not for their temporal ones, to them I say in rebuttal that we must come to their aid ourselves or have others come to their aid.” (1)

Faithful to his charism during missions, St. Vincent, apart from preaching and teaching catechism, devotes himself always to the foundations of charities for the relief of the material needs of the poor. Times have now changed. The “irruption” of the poor into society and into the church, the deepening awareness of the dignity of the human person and of his/her exigencies in all the demands of life, the clamour for justice in the face of a world become more and more unequal, today raises for us disciples of St. Vincent, if we wish to be faithful to his spirit, the urgent question of justice in the Mission. Hence the title of our reflection: Justice and Charity in the Mission.

We’ll take our reflections in 3 stages: a) present day ethical perspectives discussed in the debate which will follow and I shall present some lines of action, in the light of our reflections and our experience as missionaries in Brazil. b) rooted-ness in biblical theology, c) Vincentian perspectives. I shall propose a few questions to be.

Right at the start, the question could be asked: What justice is in question? Everyone knows the definition and distinction, traditionally coming from Aristotle (2), while passing through Thomas Aquinas and the teaching at school, referred to as: communicative, distributive and legal justice.

The definition, as well as the etymology to which the word is generally associated with the word itself(4) shows sufficiently the insufficiency and ambiguity of the classic triad: a) the tendency “to enclose justice in the formal schema of habitués virtue”, by imposing on it “a subjective marking”(5), b) the concretising of the object of justice within the limits of a pre-determined order, or the qualification of strict requirement tends towards a legal minimum. Consideration of others finds itself oriented, on the other hand, towards interpersonal relationships—individual or juridical persons among themselves—on the horizontal plane.

The vertical plan, ascending or descending: Individual---state, individual---society, or vice versa is ill-proposed due to the fact that the conception of these last named (state and society) presents them as realities which are perfect and unchangeable, which demand the respect of law and order, ignoring the sense of justice as moralisation and transformation of social structures, economic structures and political structures.

The accent and tangential predominance of commutative justice(6) or at least of the commutative aspect or of changes (in all dissection meanings) according to the system—all come back to the taste of the liberal palate and are very well assimilated, because easily manipulated are made into instruments by the masters of the global market.

The longing for equality and for participation, springing up from within society of technical progress, reveals a progress of the human conscience, as Paul VI already mentioned. From there new and legitimate demands arise, in the context of difficult relationships of people among themselves.

Attention is today directed towards the different obstacles to a balanced existence which faces the growing complexity of the social organism, which tends to block out irresponsibility and to dilute into anonymity the connivances and inertias which are contrary to a solid engagement in favor of life. This brings up the urgent need of a definition of justice in world in a fuller way.

### 1. For a re-definition of Justice

There are rights and basic demands of the human person which are anterior to any concrete juridic order. There are “adjustments” changes and transformations to be carried out not only within and arising from systems or from an established order, but to establish and to implant into the heart of the structures, the creative function of law, already present in the Geneva conference (1996) in the Church and Society(8).

Rather than an order to be respected and to be given status in conformity with the classic concept of justice, one is faced with a disorder to be undone and a new order to be created. Already in 1962 Mgr. Bruno Solages presented audacious and very pertinent ideas on this question in his excellent work “Initiation Metaphysique”(9)

This new understanding has given rise to the expression “social justice”, given currency by Pius XI and used subsequently in later documents on the Social Documents of the Church. Since then it appears, assimilated into theory, in almost all political programs, making explicit the ethical ideal of an economic and social order.(10)

The phenomenon of severe impoverishment of immense crowds of humanity, a new “sign of the times” drives human consciences and especially those of Christians towards the inescapable problem of justice in a still larger sense. It is a question of its dynamic and evolving face, in a continuous and never-achieved effort to articulate dialectically its utopian horizon with the reality of possible ways forward, (which might be) absolutely necessary and inevitable.

For believers it is the link-up, always in a fertile tension of the “not yet” of the eschatological ideal with the “already there” of the presence of the liberating grace for all people, especially the poor, for life.

In fact, justice today is a question of life. It is the radical and dynamic conscience of a struggle and an action in favor of life. Because life, of itself, is the source of the fundamental law to survive with dignity, to be agent and subject of one’s own history, to affirm one’s citizenship by participating at different levels of human existence and activity. Such is social, economic, political, ecological justice.

As formerly with the people of God in Egypt, an ethical clamour is arising for a new exodus (11) out of a situation which is more and more unsustainable.

### 3. A Stifled Clamour

People having power within the system tend today, not without an evident dose of cynicism, to stifle the cry of the poor, disqualifying them in order to silence their clamour. They seek to empty their conscience of “the oppressed”, in order to appease their attitude of domineering masters of the world by proclaiming “They’re not being exploited. They are not needed”(12).

It is clear that the long standing and monstrous exploitation of workers, the imposition of unjust and belittling conditions within commercial enterprises between groups and nations (13) based on power structures has made possible a continuing and fantastic accumulation of resources in the haves of the powerful. The immense potential for productivity, which now is based upon technical and informational progress, secured at the price of the blood and sweat of the impoverished, is in the process of eliminating the

working force more and more, those who were previously bought up at a base price on the open and saturated market of the “industrial reserve army”.

For the poor, then material to be pushed aside, a marginalized and embarrassing multitude, there doesn't even remain the possibility of a justifiable cry. They might be at the most an object of pity, a good means of nourishing one's vanity, to relieve one's conscience in promotional propaganda about certain types of campaigns of solidarity and humanitarian aid.

More than ever, then, there arises the challenge of an authentic ethical-historical reflection in order to awake among people an awareness of the present situation of injustice and to establish the radical and primary right to survive and to live for each man and woman who comes into the world. Further, never was there such urgent need for a vision of justice by way of a global task, by way of conquering movement, within the concept of human life as a process and continual march toward a Utopian goal of total humanitarianism, in the midst of which there should arise ever new exigencies, responding to the development of the human person, more and more sensitive to the call of life, as rights in justice.

Consequently the task is to construct a life, a worthy life, always a fuller life, since life “is a reality, through nature itself, always open to something more.”(14) What is at stake obviously is the life of the impoverished, the marginalized, the people excluded, but who are the chosen ones and those preferred by the heart of God and the liberating project of Christ, assumed with a mystic passion through the charism of our holy founder: to announce the Gospel of Life, the Kingdom of God and His justice(15).

Now we will pass to another area for reflection

## PART II

### REFERENCES IN BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

#### 1. The word “justice” in the Bible.

Before recalling the two key categories of the Bible which are proper to our reflection, we've made it useful to make an allusion to analysis of the terms used in order to express the concept of justice in the ancient Near-East, and the people of the Bible, following the interesting study of Leon Epstein (16).

The results from minute observations, based on numerous and serious quotations, that it is absolutely impossible to confine the biblical concept of justice in a single meaning and to reduce it to one simple area. (17)

Long before any biblical elaboration, but in the same context there comes up “the idea of plenitude and abundance of a happy life where everything is found in its place and where nothing is lacking.(18) Precisely this elasticity of the word sends us back to the plenitude of the Kingdom of God and his justice in the New Testament, which means liberation and life for the poor.

#### 2. The Kingdom of God in the Gospel and a new order of justice.

“Seek first the kingdom of God and his justice and all that will be given to you over and above(19)” This verse occurs in the full context of the evangelical discourse recounted by Matthew. It follows immediately the sever warnings of Jesus:” No one can serve two masters”(20) which he makes clear in these words: “You can't serve God and money.”(21) So, far from blaming the efforts, full of anguish and grief, of the poor in order to survive, there's a clear reprimand against the unsatiable desire to consume, to accumulate, a reprimand which sets and exclusion order against the wicked rich people of his world. Don't amass treasures for yourselves on earth. (22)

The “over and above” is neither encouragement of inertia nor approval of non involvement. The exegesis of the poor is illuminating. “In a new world where there will be established more just relationships throughout the extent of people’s lives, where people will be valued for who they are and not for what they have or for the power they possess, where fundamental laws of the human person will be respected, where the sovereignty of a just God will be honored and also radical equality of all his children. In a word, where people would seek the Kingdom of God and his justice, the “over and above” would mean a worthy life for everyone which would be a consequence, a spontaneous fruit of the true order, of the new order of justice and of “love without pretence”.(23)

“the spirit which is life” is present when they discover that small undertakings and successes, as with the miracles of Jesus, make present the reality of the the Kingdom

It is precisely in the light of this central category of the Bible that we best grasp the meaning of the justice of the God of the Kingdom. Kingdom the fullness of which they await in hope and that they are already living in faith.

Once again it would be cruel and I think it would be neither theological nor biblical, to postpone the hopes of the poor and to situate them exclusively at a transtemporal level in the final parousia of the Lord.

This intuition of the faith and this experience of life are expressed by our theologians with competence and in an appropriate fashion. (34) We shall see later an aspect of this “organic theology”, that of sin, closely linked to our subject.

### 3 Covenant and the justice of the God of the Kingdom

Because of time, I shall limit myself to some quick references to two important aspects of our subject.

The justice of God in his Covenant with the people holds first of all a certain juridical character which his goodness and mercy wished to confer on it: “I am your God and you shall be my people”.(35)

Obviously it doesn’t mean equal partners. But the sense of gratuity and of gift in the Covenant, doesn’t take away the obligation of justice.

In proposing the Covenant as a pact made between two, God wishes to oblige himself to be faithful to it since he is a God of justice.

The justice of God is therefore his fidelity to the Covenant and to all that it involves: election, promise, land, numerous descendants, blessing, protection and life.(36)

That is also why to protect the life of the people, by establishing justice and rights “is one of the great exigencies of God in the Old Testament. It is in this mission that is best expressed fidelity to the Covenant between God and his people. The God of life and of love wishes that among his people justice should reign and the rights of all should be respected., especially those of the poor”....Those are the fruits which ought to be produced by the vine which the Lord has planted and takes care of”.(37)

But the justice of the God of the Kingdom is elevated and transfigured especially in the character of espousals in the Covenant, present so forcefully and so suggestively in the Old Testament(38) as well as in the parables of Jesus (39). This spousal character of the Covenant binds the Lord to give himself to his people and to bestow on them all that the love of a spouse requires: presence, protection, tenderness, fidelity, justice, giving of self and of life. “in light of the Covenant between Yahweh and his people (between Christ and the Church) social themes (let’s add: economic, political, ecological themes and those of radical justice) are transformed into questions of faith, into elements which characterise the quality of the faith and cannot be reduced to the level of simple social legislation. In its light also we judge the “false jubilees” which only ease the situation of the poor in order to keep them under the yoke, adding in a gratitude complex”. (40) Finally, in the light of the New Covenant” one sees that Christ loved the Church and gave himself for it”.(41)

### 4 Justice of the Kingdom and new notion of sin

The wide breath of the justice shown forth in ethic perspectives finds its echo and its deepening in theology.

There one speaks of structural disorder. Here one speaks of sin, structural sin, social sin, systematic injustice in so far as fundamental sin against the gift of life received from the Creator and won back by the Cross of Christ.

One cannot understand justice-life, in Christian terms, starting from any predetermined historical project, nor from any elitist criterion of social perfection or fitting into a supposedly established order, so we have said, nor inside any power-system whether civil, ecclesiastical or mixed.(42)

The eschatological dimension of the plenitude of life and of justice which reveal the holiness of God(43) maintains us in a critical and vigilant attitude in the face of any kind of historical project and invites us to “relativise” all structures, institutions or specific organisations of human life--since it is always open to something more, as we have already said--always in tension, let us now add, towards a meta-historical and supernatural plenitude,

Starting from biblical reflexion on the liberation of the people of God from the slavery of Pharaoh, the outcry of the poor of our Basic Communities, with their vigorous tone, is awakening the conscience of the Church: “The clamour of millions of people calling on their pastors for a liberation which is not coming to them from any quarter”(44) has touched the hearts of the bishops of the second General Conference of the Latin-American Bishops. The prophetic document of Medellin denounces the “fact of collective misery” as an “injustice which cries out to heaven”(45). It speaks of the “situation of injustice”, “of the institutionalised violence”(46), and of the “unjust inequalities” as a “rejection of the Lord”(47).

This language becomes a theme in moral theology. Henceforth the expressions “structure of sin”, “structural sin”, “social sin” keep occurring in other official documents of the Church. Pastoral theological reflexion understands these to be in opposition to the life-project revealed in the Exodus, when the people fall away from this project.

God is there defined as “just” and “our Justice”(48). To be the mirror of a just God and a friend of life, in the reciprocity of the Covenant, welcoming into the promised land, the offer of life(49) through structures of fraternal life, such is the vocation of the people of God since they will one day give birth from in their midst to a Saviour and Lord of life, whose mission will be the redemption of the life of everyone, especially the poor.(50).

The sin of individuals and of the entire people would be to destroy this project, choosing death.(51).

Our theology has met the challenge of making a theory of this project of life, rescuing it from an “ancient pietistic and ritualistic model”(52). It links virtue and the fundamental attitude of the Christian who seeks justice to the appeals of “the Spirit who is life through justice”, and “whose desire is life”(53). Let us mention here the prophetic intuition, more contemporary than ever, of our martyr the great Mgr Romero, who, paraphrasing St Irenaeus, used to say “The glory of God is the life of the poor”.

This life is always sacrificed on the altar of the sacred demands of market forces!

It is appropriate to refer here to Hugo Assman who cleverly unmasks the “sacralisations” and “theologisations” which liberal economists and neo-liberals like to make in order to legitimise, in a subtle and underhand way the “untouchable” structures, exigencies and rituals of the market, whose “natural laws” are guided by an “invisible and providential hand”(54). He unmasks the process which aims at silencing the outcry of a clamouring reality, where the poor person counts only as a variable in the equation of the economic system which seeks only effective productivity.,

The “religious”, “unshakeable” and “idol-worshipping” certitudes of an economic rationale impose more and more “sacrificial rites”, in the offering of human lives on the altar of the god of the market, postponing ceaselessly the hopes of the poor or the ignorant to the profit of the dizzy voraciousness of dreams of power and domination. Here one makes contact with the root of the great present-day sin: idolatry of the god Money, sharply attacked by Jesus modulaed by the Apostle Paul: “Money is the root of all evil. Because they gave themselves to this , some have fallen from the faith”(55). It finds itself encrusted into legislations and social organisations, present in perverse reports of work and commerce, inserted into death-dealing structures of an unequal system

Structural sin, sinful situation, institutionalised injustice which has has awakened theology to a new concption of sin.

Ecclesiastic instances and perplexed teologians have manifested some anxiety about this notion of structural sin - sin without sinner?- and efforts to focus meaning and warnings given have not been lacking(56).

John-Paul II rightly recalls its analogical character since the proper subject of moral responsibility is always and only the person.

And nevertheless one is not being faced with a pure and simple metaphore when one speaks of structural sin. In fact he structures of sin, a consequence of a multitude of personal sins, once it installs itself , acquires a relative independance and act with a certain particular and perverse logic, encouraging and favouring persona l sin (without suppressing free will, obiously). These in their turn have and effect back on the structures establishing a vicious circle.

One has to place oneself into this dialectical vision in order properly to understand and throw light upon structural sinas a moral category, always bringing this back to personal responsibility.

It is appropriate to recall here the deep biblical roots of this sin in the sin of the people who break the Covenant, move away from the project of love and of life, oppress the poor the orphan and the widow(57).

There is question here of real participation in the “mystery of iniquity”, which all of us are responsible for, through inertia omission, laziness indifference or even by complicity or connivence, passive or active, “which often hide themselves behind an alleged impossibility of transforming the world, or behind a flight from fatigue or from sacrifice, sometimes invoking so-called reasons of a superior order”(58).

This worries the Church, calling into question a whole way of living within the Church and doing theology there. This worries society, calling into question its methods of discrimination and domination.(59)

In order to assimilate it,, it is necessary to call into question our own particular manner of being Church, and to open ourselves to a new ecclesiology starting from an “option for the poor” which is effective and coherent.(60)

We must also be ready to change “our place in society” in order to be coherent with the Option for the Poor and with what we are invited to in our Constitutions Statutes(61). To pass over to the poor person’s side who will become a subject in the Church and will have a word to say to him about his way of speaking and of situating himself when faced with social and economic structures and the masters of the system. To make a change of axis, to alow ourselves to be challenged in a gospel way by the poor who are the first to be destined for the Kingdom. To take sides, to revise our friendships, to re-make our pacts. It is a matter of changinon the level of practice and of understanding. Hence of theology, of sin, of justice, of understanding of the “Kingdom of God and of his justice”.

Wouldn’t there be a place here to carry out that conscience-examination proposed by the Pope

for all the Church-disciples, families, institutes, religious - taking solidarity with the poor as a starting place, as suggested in *Redemptoris Missio* (62)?

## 5 Justice of the Kingdom and charity

At the start we asked : what justice are we considering?

Now we are asking : what charity?

In treating this question we are going to throw into relief official doctrinal references of the Church in order to support our reflexions.

### 5.1 The works of charity

The decree “*Ad Gentes*” in the chapter on “missionary work itself” alludes to the active presence of Christians, who after the example of Jesus bring help to material miseries and insists on the witness value of such presence (63).

The decree on the “*Apostolate of the Laity*” claims works of charity as “a duty and a right which are inalienable for the Church” (64)

John-Paul II in “*Redemptoris Missio*” again stresses the value of “works of charity” and their particular efficacy for expressing the soul of missionary activity: love which is and becomes the motive force of the mission” (65).

One has only to look at the world with the compassionate heart of Christ to see that the works of charity are still very much needed: victims of war and violence, prisoners, handicapped persons, drug-addicts, etc. are all there. It would be an insensitivity incompatible with the mercy of the gospel and the gratuity of love (66) to close one’s eyes to their appeal: “You give them something to eat, says our Lord.(69). “Consider the story of Lazarus and the parabol of the Good Samaritan as anachronistic and you are not understanding the essence of Christianity” (68)

It falls to us to discover, in a creative fidelity, to discover how to put this into practice in the respect due to the person of the poor in a manner as liberating as possible.

### 5.2 Political charity

This involves a rather broad subject, and a controversial one perhaps, which takes in our previous reflexions about justice and charity.

The expression comes from Pius XI in his allocution of 18 December 1927 addressed to the *F&U&I* where his text reads: “Charity is political”. It later appears in “*Quadragesimo Anno*” under the expression “*Social Charity*” (69)

The Council speaks of “charity and political force” as attitudes of Christian involvement(70).

Present-day theology has begun speaking of the “political” character of charity particularly within Liberation Theology in the struggle for the transformation of structures.

There then appears the liberating pastoral activity, by Christians, religious and priests, of the Ecclesial Communities, as well as the pastoral sensitivity of numerous Third World bishops whose prophetic voice has resounded vigorously in the clear and express “preferential option for the poor”. This also appears in the proclamations and denunciations of the two great official documents of the General Conferences of the Latin-American Episcopate, that of Medellin (1968) and then that of Puebla(1979).

The theological theorisation of political charity and the pastoral activity engaged on frightened those politically responsible for the system.

The celebrated document of Santa Fe on the political strategy for “America” states textually: “the external politics of the United States of America must begin to meet head on (and not merely react subsequently) Liberation Theology. The role of the Church in Latin-America is vital for the concept of political liberty. Lamentably Marxist-Leninist forces have used the Church as a political arm against Private property (sic), and the capitalist system of production, infiltrating into the religious community ideas which are more communist than christian”. (71).

It is easy to notice the noise provoked in political and religious circles exacerbated subsequently by Santa Fe II: suspicions, doubts, incomprehensions, accusations and above all, frequent denunciations where ideologies, to tell the truth, came on to the scene and not simply love of truth and the Gospel.

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Personally during my 11 years of missionary work in a regions of extreme poverty and conflict in the west of Bahai in Brazil, I never knew of any deviation which menaced christian faith or morals. Quite the contrary, the poor people are very believing and love their pastors and the Church.

However that might be, in the face of so many rumours, the just preoccupations and guardedness of superiors were understandable. They were already contained in Paul VI’s *Evangelii* evangelical non-violence(74), sin, responsibility and the need for personal conversion(75), the integral character of christian liberation embracing all dimensions of people, openness to the absolute of God(76).

There is no condemnation at all. On the contrary, there is a recognition of the necessity of transforming action on the social structures and with regard to institutionalised violence(77), the need to announce liberation as the content of mission(78) and the reality of the Kingdom which has already begun in the world(79).

Not to do this would be to ignore the Gospel, to lack love of the neighbour(80). There we have obviously a new facet of charity--political charity

Finally in these documents there is given stimulating encouragement to every christian who in the name of his faith gets involved in these struggles(81), as well as to the Basic Ecclesial Communities whose evangelising capability and “missionary radiance” are a “sign of the vitality of the Church” and “a point of depart for a new society in the civilisation of love”. These orientations are clearly recognised in *Redemptoris Missio*, No.51.

### 5.3 Political Charity, a new mystique

One sees therein being born, in the engagement springing from political charity a new mystique engendering a new type of sanctity. Happily we possess new witnesses and martyrs of this.

This mystique, quelling a first ethical indignation against a culture of death, develops and draws vitality and finds nourishment in a deep experience of the Saviour who proclaims through the poor person, those excluded and forgotten by the system, words of justice and life.

“I’m hungry”: Fill me with bread, with the Word, with life.

“I’m thirsty”: Slake my thirst with justice.

“I’m naked”: Clothe me with the right to be a person, a brother/sister, a child of the same Father!

## III VINCENTIAN PERSPECTIVES

1 Docility to Providence:” I have a special devotion to following the adorable Providence of God step by step(82)A traditional phrase invoked against precipitation. This is the time I believe to take another reading of it not in the light of these words and the justified cautions of the founder, but that of his practice and of his sense of innovation. And so we are always invited and stimulated to lengthen and hasten generously our pace , docile to the calls of god who in those excluded, pushed aside forgotten, call us to have “hunger and thirst for justice”

We know well just how far St Vincent went in this welcoming Providence, docile to the signs of the times. he was a pioneer of courageous and totally new initiatives in his day. The courage to follow the steps of Providence will help us to make much progress in our missions.

2---Concrete and effective love: ”Let us love God my brothers, let us love God, let it be at the expense of our arms and in the sweat of our brows”(83).

It is possible that works of mercy and helping will not demand today as much strength and sweat. But how much strength, blood, sweat and tears for humble but intrepid action of the David’s of the Mission against the Goliath’s of the system, in favour of justice, involvement for transforming structures, to benefit the life and the liberation of the poor, of solidarity with those without land or shelter, with the crowd of those forgotten by the marketplace. What a price to pay in order to direct ourselves towards those more effective and vast horizons of involvement in political charity, subversive of the reigning order and of the false justice of today’s scribes and Pharisees.

The visit of St. Vincent to Mazarin in order to suggest his resignation says a lot in this regard.

3. Creativity: “Love is infinitely inventive” (84).

It is not necessary to repeat St. Vincent as it is not necessary to repeat Jesus Christ: “Truly I say to you, he who believes in me will do the works that I do. He will do even greater works” (Jn. 14:12). What counts, is the inventive fidelity to the charism received as our heritage. “To loose the dynamism of the charism our regretted Mother Guillemin said, Is to betray most gravely the charism and the founder and the Holy Spirit which inspired it.”(85).

The crowd of forgotten people, goes impoverished in every way, those discriminated against, migrants, those who are no use to the marketplace, or to structures, those who are in danger of elimination: They are all there. They constitute a challenge to the evangelical creativity of the missionaries for justice and for life.

We would need, who knows, to descend from our horse, to leave our high positions, like the good Samaritan not only to embrace the victims of attack but also to confront the assailant, clothed with the “shield of faith” and the “helmet of salvation”, and the “breastplate of justice”, carrying ”the sword of the Spirit”, that is to say the Word of God, shod with zeal, inflamed with love-ininitely inventive- in order to “fight against Principalities, against powers, against Rulers of this world of darkness” in order to “ resist the wiles of Satan” and “quench the flaming arrows of the Evil One”(86).

4. The Entire Person

“If there is any among you who thinks they have entered the Congregations to evangelise the poor and not to assist them...etc...(87).

In this age of well established Christianity where the missions were only a preaching of salvation of the soul, the evangelical intuition of the heart of Vincent sees the entire man body and spirit. “the poor are dying of hunger and are being damned”. His heart is beating in sympathy of that of Christ. “I have pity on this multitude who for 3 days have been with me... tired and worn out like sheep without a shepherd... and he began to instruct them...give them, yourselves, something to eat”(88).

5. Mystic and exclusive option for the poor.

“The poor priest of the mission are only for poor people.”(89). “A company, oh God! who is going to announce the Gospel only to the poor: and never-the-less that is our rule”.(90) “Our heritage then is the poor”(91). That is left “like a monument to the company a memorial for posterity”(92).

It suffices to pay attention to the accents of joy, to the expressions full of faith of this conference of 17 May 1658 in order to be convinced that there is a profound spiritual experience of faith in it, a contemplative experience, a mystical option.

An exclusive option, let us add, based on his all too clear and convincing words. That is precisely the “unheard” character of which he is speaking (93): fundamental, institutional, constitutive option-not preferential in our case.

And yet exclusivity without exclusion. Exclusivity in fidelity to others, chosen by a vow to God, like that of spouses. Fidelity to this exclusivity renders the love of spouses more fruitful, more open, more ready to welcome others.

Our fidelity to the poor will make us more open to universal love, to the great causes of humanity, more useful to the church of God, more fruitful for the Kingdom and its justice.

## Conclusion

Our key to reading the meaning of justice and charity in the mission makes us go beyond the dichotomy horizontal-vertical and the meaningless opposition between justice and charity. They tend towards the same objective, provoke identical initiatives.

From the Christian point of view it is urgent to go beyond the dichotomy of justice/charity. The key to this going beyond is precisely the conception of justice under its radical aspect of plenitude, of exigency for life for all, and of charity in its political aspect.

Charity without justice has no concrete content. On the contrary, justice reaches the horizon of plenitude in charity.

Love means and makes radical the exigencies of justice and gives it a new motive, an interior thrust and force.

They are two expressions of the same Christian reality: the necessary effort of the Christian in the construction of a human society in accord with the ideal of eschatological salvation realised by Christ.

That is the same reality with diverse and complementary nuances.

Charity makes obvious the religious horizon (Intentionality and Christian Cosmology).

Justice puts the accent on the intra-historical content of Christian salvation.

“Human action for justice under this aspect contains a special density and keeps a close link with the definitive Kingdom. It cannot be reduced to a simple means of salvation for the individuals who participate in it. Insofar as it is a struggle against objective evil and human sin, it is the anticipation of the definitive Kingdom in the temporality of history” (94) The presence of love and Christian liberation in the tissue of the world and of human relationships (95).

Under this integrating conception there falls to the ground distinctions which lead to distortions (96).

Justice and charity spring from the same source, are nourished from the same source, and flow into the same sea: the love of God “beyond all understanding”.

They make up together missionary Kerygma. They call people and the system to the “metanoia” of the kingdom.

To announce the risen Jesus, to proclaim that God has delivered him from death, he, the holy and the just one (97), is to announce Life. To say that God has approved of him(98), is to proclaim that the project of the liberation of Jesus of Nazareth for the poor of the kingdom is approved.

It is thus that the resurrection and the witness of the apostles have been understood by the disciples of the first Christian community: they loved one another with a single heart and a single soul, “faithful to the prayers and teachings of the apostles”; “among them no one was in need” ; “no one called his own what belonged to him”, but “they sold all that they possessed and shared everything”, in “the joy and simplicity of their hearts”, “praising God” in fraternal union “the breaking of bread” and the “communion of life”(99).

In the mission we are called to awaken in the heart of the poor the hope of a “new world”, to involve ourselves and to help them to become involved in this struggle to conquer the Kingdom of justice and of charity.

## **CHARITY AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT IN THE MISSION**

*Sr. Mary Grace Deriu, DC*

Dear Confreres, Sisters and Laity, my fraternal and respectful greeting to you all.

My task is to treat the theme: "CHARITY AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT IN THE MISSION."

Confident of gaining your kind understanding, I am relying on your good disposition to help me overcome my emotion and to conquer my embarrassment.

As a premise I wish to summarize the dynamics of how we work:

- 1) The Mission is always prepared and organized by the Missionaries, in agreement with the Pastor and active church groups. The theme is chosen, the best time is set, and all the matters that are necessary for the success of the Mission are determined. As far as possible representatives of the above mentioned groups should meet in order to deal with the realities that face them.
- 2) We members of the group work in pairs, a lay person and a Sister, depending on the needs of the community, and our own availability. There should take part in the mission two or three other couples as I have already noted. The engagement should be for two or three weeks. We would arrive seven days before the Missionaries. At first we work alone. Later we will carry out our roles, while the Missionaries begin theirs.
- 3) On the day of our arrival the Pastor will give the mandate by a simple and impressive ceremony within the celebration of Mass, or during the recitation of Vespers. The ceremony simply consists in handing over the Cross before the community united in prayer. At this moment our work officially begins.
- 4) We are quests of the families that make themselves available for this service. Customarily the meals are taken together with the family, and the accommodations depend on what we find available.

Then begin the family visits. Starting at the outskirts and moving toward the center, we work to contact all the key families. We have contact with them; we explain the mission program; we strive to make them sensitive to the obligations brought about by this moment of grace. We form a favorable climate which gives rise to a cordial relationship in which we come to know the various problems in which the family lives. And in keeping with the opportunities which open to us, and where advisable, we suggest a meeting with the Missionary. Often times we take it upon ourselves to point out cases concerning the old and infirm.

This type of approach allows us to become aware of the problems and difficulties, and even of the joys of the people we meet. From this flows a message, a very simple message

about Christ and the Gospel, preparatory to a more ordered and complete message given by a missionary.

As a Daughter of Charity the experience of the Mission has always been wonderful. These are very beautiful and enriching moments, coming together with the many good things of my daily life. By means of these experiences, I have found a way of acquiring a deeper sensitivity and more profound attention to the problems that present themselves, leading to a greater openness and availability.

As Mother Guillemin used to say: "The Daughter of Charity must travel the world's horizons," aware as was St. Vincent of the new realities which we encounter, which are the signs of the times.

It is surely nothing new, but the problem that we meet with ever increasing frequency is that of the people who have "wandered away." It is a difficult problem to frame because there are many reasons that lead people to stray from a more active and committed church life. Even in the more complex cases, those, for example, who claim to have no interest in God, and anything that has to do with him, our attitude must always be a Christian one, always meeting these people filled with the spirit of God, speaking only and always with charity in the name of the Church, even offering if necessary to help with their material needs, accompanied by prayer in the natural way of St. Vincent.

Operatively we find a precise and to the point guide in our Directory. Allow me to quote one item, No. 40, which states:

"Witnesses of Christ, Lord of our life, we will apply ourselves fully so that those who meet us and listen to us, may be led to meet him through us."

My best experience on the Mission is when I witness the return to the Father of those who have wandered off: the great and deep joy that they felt after a long time away; the evident happiness that they know, being liberated from the weight of their bonds, and lifted up from their discouragement.

It is very important to lead souls to dialog especially within the family. There are many cases of loneliness of those who live with family members, spouses, parents and children. We all too often notice the inability to interact and to listen, which confirms the old saying that: "One is nevermore alone than when one is in a crowd." So we give particular attention to those who show a simple desire of finding someone with whom to speak.

Very often we meet people who ask only that we afford them a bit of attention, a minute or so of our time to talk to us. When we simply listen to them, they gain a sense of importance. Many times from this non-judgmental listening, a strong confidence springs up. We notice it often happens if they do not know us, the barriers of shame and human respect are broken down, and what is more, we are led to respect them and show our gratitude for having honored us with their esteem and trust.

We close our meeting with a brief prayer, with a cordial and affectionate farewell expressing the wish of seeing each other in the course of the Mission. And so from house to house, from family to family, from the last house in the country, we move to the center of the town.

From my experience on the Mission I have learned a great lesson: the duty of respecting to the utmost; respect everyone we meet. I may not understand, I may not share their feelings, but I have the duty to respect. Everyday I meet cultures and ways of life vastly different from my own upbringing and formation. I recall an important phrase from Pope Paul VI, pointing out that our times do not need pronouncements, but witnesses. Every day the struggles of daily life insistently repeat this phrase. Above all the people who are poor in every sense, those who no longer have anything, those who have lost everything, give me to understand by their silence and by their pain, that all they want of me is to help them regain their dignity. I am walking along their path in order to accompany them however briefly. I must walk with them to show them by my deeds that it is always possible to resume walking a road that they may have forgotten.

This is the human development taught me through the work that I do on the Mission. It seems that this way is well situated within the context of global evangelization. This is a point well stated in a pastoral document from the Italian Bishops, entitled *Evangelization and Sacrament*. In it on pg. 33 No. 81 we read: "The value of all the facets of human development to which the people of our time have been made conscious is based in the Gospel. They have been reincarnated and relived in the very life of the Church. The sacramental reality suited as it is to men and woman in their concrete situations, is understood in all the depths of its being. It makes one recognize and struggle for the just needs of this development; for liberation, for justice and peace."

And you, priests, sisters and laity who know better than I what was impressed on people's minds in the Council, make it incumbent on us in the Missions to gather together and to make clear to all THE DIRECTION IN WHICH THE CHURCH must go.

Surely this must be presented to our people with conviction, having them understand that the Church is made up of all the baptized who profess the faith, while at the same time being respectful of all those who do not share our faith.

To Mary and St. Vincent, evangelizer and servant of the poor, we entrust our work. May they guide us in proclaiming the Gospel of Christ; may they bless us and the people that we have met and will meet in the future.

Stephen India, C.M., Translator

# The Vincentian missionary spirit

– yesterday and today –

*Robert P. Maloney, C.M.*

I ask you today, my brothers and sisters, to join me in reflecting on our name. St. Vincent reminds us that people from the earliest times, spontaneously called us "the *missionaries*."<sup>1</sup> The Lord sends us out. Our vocation is not to remain fixed in a single place, to sink permanent roots. Jesus speaks to us as he did to his disciples at the end of Mark's gospel: "Go! Go into the whole world and preach the gospel to every creature."<sup>2</sup>

Mission is not merely an activity of the Church; it is its very being. Over the course of the Church's history mission has taken many forms: preaching, teaching, witnessing, crusading, dialoguing, counseling, accompanying, liberating, inculturating.

What, then, does it mean to be a Vincentian missionary? This is a crucial question for us, since it touches on our identity. There is no doubt about our calling: most of us here are members of the Congregation of the *Mission*; all of us are *missionaries*.

## Some characteristics of the Vincentian missionary

Let me simply outline for you *some* characteristics of a Vincentian missionary. There are surely many others. I encourage you to supplement the list with your own reflections.

1. *The missionary is mobile, on fire to spread the good news.*

Hardly anything could be clearer in the New Testament. Jesus comes from the Father and returns to the Father,<sup>3</sup> the source of all mission. He engages in an itinerant ministry. He gives his followers a mandate: "Go into the whole world and preach the gospel to every creature."<sup>4</sup>

St. Vincent is eloquent on the need for mobility: "Let us imagine that He says to us: 'Go forth, missionaries, go forth. What, are you still here? Look at the poor souls who are awaiting you, whose salvation perhaps depends upon your preaching and catechesis!'"<sup>5</sup> He holds up before the eyes of the Company the great missionaries of other communities who

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. SV III, 356.

<sup>2</sup>Mk 16:15.

<sup>3</sup>Jn 16:28; cf. Jn 1:1, Jn 14:28.

<sup>4</sup>Mk 16:15.

<sup>5</sup>SV XI, 134.

had gone to the Indies, to Japan, to Canada "to complete the work which Jesus Christ began on earth and never abandoned from the moment he was called."<sup>6</sup>

The Church exists to evangelize, to proclaim that Jesus is Lord. So too do we. This means that we will be agile, quick to move when new needs arise. Our love will be expansive, like a fire. We will want to tell others the good news that Jesus is alive and present.

One of the principal signs that we are filled with a mobile missionary spirit will be the willingness to leave places where the Church is firmly established, and where others are already ministering, in order to be free for more pressing needs that others are unable to meet or to reach out to other groups that are at present neglected.

## 2. *He is an evangelizer.*

The core of our mission is evangelization, which, in the Catholic tradition, has always been a broad, inclusive concept.<sup>7</sup> As Paul VI pointed out: "Evangelization is a complex process made up of varied elements: the renewal of humanity, witness, explicit proclamation...."<sup>8</sup>

St. Vincent tells us the evangelization involves "word and work." We must first do and then teach. Evangelization, for him, involves not just preaching but action too. He calls both the Vincentians and Daughters of Charity to serve the poor "spiritually and corporally."

In light of St. Vincent's teaching, our evangelization will be fully alive when we proclaim the good news:

- a. through the language of works:<sup>9</sup> performing the works of justice and mercy which are a sign that the kingdom of God is really alive among us;
- b. through the language of words: announcing with deep conviction the Lord's presence, his love, his offer of forgiveness to all;
- c. through the language of relationships: being *with* the poor, working *with* them, forming a community that shows the Lord's love for all.

## 3. *The missionary has an international perspective, a global world view.*

This is very much the way St. Vincent envisioned his mission. In an era when travel was difficult and most people died within a few miles of their birthplace, he sent missionaries to Poland, Italy, Algeria, Madagascar, Ireland, Scotland, the Hebrides, and the Orkneys. He himself in his old age longed to set out for the Indies.<sup>10</sup>

Two signs, especially, will witness to global awareness on our part.

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<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup>Cf. Avery Dulles, "Seven Essentials of Evangelization," in *Origins* 25 (# 23; November 23, 1995) 397-400.

<sup>8</sup>*Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 24.

<sup>9</sup>Cf. SV II, 4.

<sup>10</sup>SV XI, 402.

A first, concrete sign of this awareness is the ability to respond to urgent needs throughout the world. We must never let provincial ties hold us back. When the needs of the Church are greater elsewhere, we should go with liberty.

A second sign of an international perspective is solidarity among our provinces. I urge you to cooperate with one another. This is already taking place through national and regional meetings, but I especially want to encourage you to cooperate in the giving of popular missions, in the formation of missionaries, and in assistance to poorer provinces. There are some things we can do much better together than we can do separately.

As Karl Rahner often pointed out, it is only in the 20th century that Catholicism has truly become a "world-Church".<sup>11</sup> Living in Rome I experience this dramatically. Especially with the opening of new missions in remote places like Tanzania, the Solomon Islands, Albania, the Altiplano of Bolivia, Mozambique, China, Kharkiv in the Ukraine, and Siberia, our own Congregation is becoming even more international.

Whereas in the period immediately after Vatican II there was significant emphasis on *provincial* identity, government, and norms, today there is a revitalized awareness of our global missionary nature.

4. *He is eager to learn the language of those he is called to serve.*

St. Vincent felt strongly about the need to learn other languages. He told us<sup>12</sup>:

*Now the diversity of languages is very great, not only in Europe, Africa and Asia, but also in Canada. For we see by the reports of the Jesuit Fathers that there are as many languages as there are tribes. The Hurons do not speak like the Iroquois, nor the latter like their neighbors. And a person who understands one group of Indians does not understand the others.*

*How then can Missionaries, bearing these differences of language in mind, go throughout the world announcing the Gospel if they know only their own language?*

The 1992 General Assembly of the Congregation of the Mission, in its third

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<sup>11</sup>Karl Rahner, "The Abiding Significance of the Second Vatican Council," in *Theological Investigations* XX, 90-102; cf. also "The Future of the Church and the Church of the Future," in *Theological Investigations* XX, 103-14.

<sup>12</sup>SV XII, 26-27.

commitment, speaks of dialogue with contemporary society. I have often appealed to all candidates for the Congregation, and as many members as possible, to become bilingual. Dialogue and mobility in contemporary society demand it. In the United States for example, almost 50% of the Catholics have a language other than English as their mother tongue. Spanish has become an essential tool for a missionary there. The situation is similar in many other countries.

5. *He is flexible.*

St. Vincent has often been described as the most balanced religious leader of his day. He blended theory and practice adeptly. While he had clear principles, he applied them with flexibility. His life and ministry give clear evidence of his adroitness in doing so. By this own account, for example, simplicity was the virtue he loved most, but he also knew very well how to remain silent when prudence demanded. He believed firmly in the importance of fidelity to one's own vocation and at times struggled mightily to keep members from abandoning their ministry. But he also knew that some members had a corrosive effect and he thanked God when they left, even hastening their way out at times.<sup>13</sup>

The contemporary missionary must have a supple mentality in regard to evangelization. In a time of rapid change, rigidity is an enemy and flexibility an ally. For example, one of the most significant changes that has taken place in the Church since Vatican II is in the role of the laity. Today we are conscious more than ever that lay people have an essential role in announcing the good news.<sup>14</sup> It is for that reason that the Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission<sup>15</sup> call the priests and brothers of the Congregation not only to evangelize the poor as missionaries, but to form others \_ priests, brothers, sisters, lay men and women \_ to participate more fully in the evangelization of the poor. Are we flexible in accepting the important roles of lay men and women in evangelizing? Do we have the suppleness to co-operate harmoniously with them?

6. *He is involved in organizing and forming others in the service of the poor.*

St. Vincent was adamant about this. Few saints are as concrete as Vincent de Paul. He realized that integral evangelization would require organization if the poor were to be served effectively. To accomplish this end, Vincent founded two communities and formed numerous lay groups. The missionaries and Daughters of Charity were to form Confraternities of Charity wherever they went.<sup>16</sup>

He brought the same organizational skills to the formation of the clergy, which St. Vincent depicted sometimes as "almost equal"<sup>17</sup> and sometimes as "equal"<sup>18</sup> to that of the mission. He organized retreats for ordinands and priests, as well as the Tuesday Conferences, besides founding 20 seminaries.

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<sup>13</sup>SV II, 381.

<sup>14</sup>*Christifideles Laici*, 7.

<sup>15</sup>C 1.

<sup>16</sup>CR I, 2.

<sup>17</sup>CR XI, 12.

<sup>18</sup>SV V, 489; VII, 561.

Nor he did not stop there. He marshalled all of the resources he could find in the service of the poor: clergy and lay, young and old, men and women, the rich and the poor themselves. The seeds of his organizational gifts continued to spread even after his death.

A recent study<sup>19</sup> points out that over 268 groups share in the Vincentian charism. At present there are 260,000 members of AIC (Ladies of Charity), 900,000 members of the Conferences of St. Vincent de Paul, 200,000 members of various Vincentian Marian Youth groups, with 46,000 in Spain alone and 7,000 in Mexico.

7. *He is inculturated.*

There is always the danger that the ideas, the customs, even the building styles of one world will simply be transported to another. Our great missionaries, like Justin de Jacobis and John Gabriel Perboyre, recognized from the start that this is insufficient. The gospel must take root and blossom within the deepest values of each culture. At the same time, it must transform what is not of God within a culture and what violates the human person.

Karl Rahner points out that the *globalization* of theology is one of the greatest needs of the Church in the years ahead. He notes that up to the present there has been an unfortunate tendency to "canonize" what was really only a manifestation of the thought patterns of western culture.<sup>20</sup> Right now, many growing younger provinces, and particularly those responsible for formation within them, face the difficult challenge of teaching philosophy and theology (so often formulated in a European context), while searching for new categories in an African or Asian or South American setting. Similarly, they search for the appropriate forms of expressing poverty, chastity, obedience, and life-long commitment to the poor within cultures very different not only from St. Vincent's, but also from those of the writers of most of the philosophy, theology, and spiritual reading books written up until recent times. In preaching popular missions, do we know well the culture of young people today? Can we express the gospel in terms that meet their deepest longings?

Along these same lines, the place of women in society and the social mores in relating to them vary greatly from North to South, and, in both hemispheres, from continent to continent. To talk with a woman on the street may be as "natural" in Los Angeles as it is "scandalous" in the Islamic Republic of Mauritania. The missionary must know the difference.

8. *He is continually being formed, creatively reshaping his preaching.*

St. Vincent tells us: "Love is inventive to the point of infinity."<sup>21</sup> I want to encourage all our missionaries to be inventive. Pose the question individually and communally: What is the deepest need of the person listening to my homily? What is this poor person asking of me concretely? What is the refugee in a camp in Africa asking? What is the sick person in his or her home crying out for? What is the AIDS patient's acutest pain? Then be creative in addressing God's word to those needs.

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<sup>19</sup>Betty Ann McNeil, *Monograph 1: The Vincentian Family Tree* (Chicago: Vincentian Studies Institute, 1996).

<sup>20</sup>Cf. Citation in W. Bühlmann, *The Church of the Future* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1986) 193.

<sup>21</sup>SV XI, 146

To that end, I urge you to find creative means for integral formation on both initial and ongoing levels. Such integral formation would have various aspects: human, spiritual, apostolic, Vincentian, biblical, theological, professional. On all levels, you yourself are the one primarily responsible for your own formation.

9. *He knows well the social teaching of the Church.*

Pope John Paul II writes very forcefully in *Centesimus Annus*<sup>22</sup>: "The 'new evangelization,' which the modern world urgently needs and which I have emphasized many times, must include among its essential elements *a proclamation of the Church's social doctrine.*" The Church has been proclaiming this doctrine in a rather clear way now for more than 100 years. Are Catholics really well evangelized in this regard? Is this social doctrine part of their explicit consciousness? I ask all Vincentians to become "experts" in teaching this social doctrine. As followers of Christ, the Evangelizer of the Poor, we must proclaim this aspect of the reign of God, by our words and by our works. We must hold up before others the Church's rich teaching, its vision of a kingdom of justice, its denunciation of unjust social structures, its proclamation that the poor must, in every era, occupy a central place in the consciousness of Christians. In our formation work, with both clergy and laity, we must present this social teaching with both clarity and urgency.

Our mission will be truly prophetic today if we preach and teach the Church's social doctrine clearly. And like many prophets, we may perhaps suffer as we do so.

10. *He is a man of God.*

Witness speaks more eloquently than words. Our lives inevitably say much more than our sermons.

For Vincent de Paul, there is only one driving force: the person of Jesus Christ. "Jesus Christ is the rule of the Mission,"<sup>23</sup> he tells us, the center of your life and activity. "Remember, Father," he writes to Monsieur Portail, one of the original members of the Congregation, "that we live in Jesus Christ by the death of Jesus Christ and that we ought to die in Jesus Christ by the life of Jesus Christ and that our life ought to be hidden in Jesus Christ and full of Jesus Christ and that in order to die like Jesus Christ it is necessary to live like Jesus Christ."<sup>24</sup>

We fulfill our mission only if we follow Christ as the Evangelizer of the Poor and put on his spirit,<sup>25</sup> only if we are holy.

Today, as in every era, the Church needs saints. It needs missionaries who are simple, humble, gentle, self-sacrificing, and filled with effective love. It needs preachers who radiate God's presence. The great missionary is not so much someone whose words are beautiful as someone whose life is striking.

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<sup>22</sup>*Centesimus Annus*, 5.

<sup>23</sup>SV XII, 130; cf. also XI, 53: "Let us walk with assurance on the royal road on which Jesus Christ will be our guide and leader."

<sup>24</sup>SV I, 295.

<sup>25</sup>C 1.

Let me state it very clearly: the missionary today must be holy. Unless we are men and women of God, we will not be genuinely effective, nor are we likely to persevere.

It is not diminished numbers in the Church that we must fear. It is not the loss of institutions. What we must really fear is the loss of fire in our hearts. What burns in the heart of the true missionary is a deep yearning, a longing to follow Christ as the Evangelizer of the Poor. The genuinely holy missionary *presences* Christ's love. Others sense it in him. He could not hide it even if he wanted to.

To be *missionaries* \_ that is our calling. Breathe deeply, my brothers and sisters, of the missionary spirit that St. Vincent inspired in his followers. Let it fill your minds and hearts. Then, go. "Go into the whole world and preach the gospel to every creature."<sup>26</sup>

Robert P. Maloney, C.M.  
Berceau of St. Vincent de Paul  
July 1997

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<sup>26</sup>Mk 16:15.



# **A Parish in Mission a Missionary Experience of the Province of Cuba**

**1994-1997 - Three Years in Mission**

*P. Jesús María Lusarreta, C.M.*

## **Presentation**

The experience which we here recount took place completely within two C.M. parishes of Cuba: Miraculous Medal and Our Lady of Mercy (Medalla Milagrosa and La Merced); and partially in two parishes of the diocese of Santiago de Cuba where the same method was used.

This experience has also been adapted as a model by "Evangelization 2000" a project of the Archdiocese of Havana, which chose our method because a "Parish in Mission" is constantly changing.

## **Why this Mission Project?**

Our popular missions have short, medium, and long projects. But none, it seems to us, puts a parish in a permanent state of Mission. And that is what we sought.

To place a parish in Mission, in constant and progressive change, means:

- Choosing a missionary pastoral rather than a pastoral of Christianity.
- Creating a permanent atmosphere of evangelization.
- Animating the community so that every evangelized person becomes an evangelizer.
- Encouraging growth and maturity in the Faith of every parishioner, in an integral way, as much in prayer and liturgy as in knowledge of the Message and commitment to the poor.
- Since we are Vincentians, seeing that our charism impregnates all structures of our Pastoral.

## **Methodological Elements**

Since our small community lived its Faith quietly, in timidity and fear, in a Christian pastoral that avoided giving witness, it needed:

- to live the Faith in small communities, returning to the style of Acts, in order to experience the Faith and be able to evangelize.

- to abandon self and move towards witness, and so discover that around every believer a little group gathers, grows and encourages one another.
- to discover that the *home* is the natural venue where God is spoken of with the family and with neighbors, and to overcome the fear of doing it.

These three elements: *The evangelizer, the Home, and the Vincentian Christian Community*, are the three essential elements of our Mission.

We began by forming the first Community, which would become a "reference point." We called a meeting, and were surprised when 60 showed up. With these we began the 12 catecheses of the Kerygma. After that we did the scrutinies, presented the Word, and started the life of the Community. Contrary to expectations, it persevered, discovered the true sense of Faith, and opened the way for forming the second Community.

With two Communities and a growing awareness of evangelization and service, we were ready to begin our new Mission.

### **Mission Structure**

In its relationship to the community, the Mission operates on three levels:

1. *Organization and planning:*  
Including:
  - Study of existing reality.
  - Division of the parish into sectors.
  - Naming those responsible for action.
  
2. *Announcement:*
  - Within the communities.
  - Constantly growing.
    - Reaching each person, house to house, respecting their level of growing in the Faith.
  
3. *Follow-up:*
  - The mission does not end with the campaigns.
    - It continues in new communities, which necessitates drawing up a Directory of Communities.

### **The Three Projected Parts of the Experiment**

- A. Objectives of the Mission;** of the different ministries.
- B. Progressive Message of the Mission** in nine phases, three per year for three years.
- C. Mission Methodology.**
  - A. *Main objective:*  
Towards a parish in mission,

- "in a community of communities."
- which reaches every parishioner.
- delivering a progressive Message.
  - awakening in them the need to live their Faith in community. (To be developed in different degrees according to Ministries.)

*B. The Message.*

To those who do not attend church we must take the experience of community, since the Gospel says: "Go. And announce..." But one visit is nothing and could be a deception. So the mission is planned to make nine visits to each home over three years, with nine Kerygma messages offered to each home, to each person, in order that the Mission be "concrete and personalized."

- Times for the big mission:
- A week in Lent
  - A week in Advent
  - A week in the summer

Each phase, besides the message, has a concrete objective.

- |            |  |   |
|------------|--|---|
| 1st phase: | Message: <i>God loves us; and He loved us first.</i><br>Objective: | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Visit each home to announce the Message.</li> <li>- Impose hands on the sick, pray for them, invite the others to form a Christian community.</li> <li>- Leave a folder explaining the theme. (This is done with every phase)</li> </ul> |
| 2nd phase: | Message: <i>Jesus Christ is our Savior.</i><br>Objective:          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Same as in phase 1, repeating the urging to form a Christian community.</li> <li>- Discovering the neediest and informing Caritas.</li> </ul>  |
| 3rd phase: | Message: <i>Jesus gave his life for us.</i><br>Objective:          | Same as in 1 and 2. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Seeking the youth</li> <li>- We can also seek children.</li> </ul>   |
| 4th phase: | Message: Jesus command: " <i>Love one another.</i> "<br>Objective: | Repeat invitation to form community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Set up the first Mission-Homes.</li> <li>- Ten homes are selected, with 8 to 14 members each (two meetings this week).</li> </ul>  |
| 5th phase: | Message: <i>Sin.</i><br>Objective:                                 | Repeat call to community, and to youth and children   |

- Get the youths to visit homes and invite other youths.
  - Invite kids to catechism.
  - Try to establish more Mission-Homes, which should be now 18, with two days in the mission.
- 6th phase:    Message:    *God is rich in Mercy.*  
Objective:    Same urging to form communities.
- A Mission-Home on every block. Should be 28 of them by now, with permanent missionaries.
- 7th phase:    Message:    *The Church: God's family.*  
Objective:    Same invitation. More Mission-Homes set up. More permanent missionaries.
- 8th phase:    Message:    *Come to the Community. Jesus awaits you.*  
Objective:    Same invitations. More Mission-Homes. More permanent missionaries.
- 9th phase:    Message:    *Virgin Mary, Servant of the poor.*  
Objective:    Same invitations.
- Reinforcing of communities.
  - Every block with a Mission-Home and permanent missionaries
  - The Message is long. Those who read must be invited to read the Gospel.

In this final phase of the Mission we desire that every person who has shown interest read the Gospel of Mark.

## **Missionary Methodology Which Has Been Used**

### **A. The Mission is developed on three levels.**

#### *1. Spiritual-apostolic level of the missionaries.*

Continual preparation of evangelizers is indispensable.

Basic theological fundamentals:

- Without prayer, no mission - Action of the Holy Spirit.
- Without risk, no evangelization - Action of the Son.
- Without work, no fruit - Action of the Father.
- Like the first Missioner - Mary, Immaculate Virgin.

Following this scheme we form missionaries.

We note: Nothing can be achieved without spiritual direction.

#### *2. Systematic presentation of the Announcement.*

- Progressive preaching of the Kerygma from house to house. Plus leaving the message, on paper, in each home.

3. *Does this style of Mission relate to our reality?*

We believe it does, totally, taking into account the characteristics of our people. Our ecclesial reality is very poor, due to the ideology of the country at this time, and for the state in which the Church has had to exist. As is well known, religion is very polarized.

- The few who come to church do so to seek a service: Mass.
- Attention to the sick is minimal.
- Catechesis is very rare, and controlled.

To breach this barrier and create an incisive, pastoral catechesis was a great risk. But we perceived signs that God's hour had arrived. We do not know why, but all commented how attendance at church was on the rise, that more youth were coming, that ... the time had come. So, we launched our New Evangelization, with its new methods, new zeal, new forms.

The first home visit was hard ... but it was wonderful to see a return to the Church. What were they told? How were they chosen? Most of them answered, and very well ... we were told it was time the Catholic Church did something like this ... since before they had abandoned us.

Establishing the first Mission-Homes was a wonderful happening. How were we able to get people to meet together in a home, when visiting homes was forbidden? The Lord opened homes to pray and listen to His Word.

Gathering the youth together was a similar experience.

And so we have had the joy of seeing the rise of a new Community,...

- By overcoming so many difficulties.
- And testifying that the Miraculous Virgin has been the number one Missioner, since every block now has her statue, which moves from house to house wherever requested, visiting both the well and the infirm.
- Seeing how children also became great missionaries.

### **The Possibility of Following this Method in Other Places:**

They used to tell me that this method worked in other places, but it was not for Cuba. Now I see no reason to doubt that it could work elsewhere.

Our parish families have all been visited nine times each for these three years. But we realize some poor hidden families have not been found and are left without a visit.

A parish ambiance has been created, and the needs of the poor discovered. Caritas has been set up under the aegis of the Mission.

Children's attendance at catechism has increased four times. And during this time different catechetical methods have arisen to facilitate taking the Word to our families.

The final objective of the Mission was not to get people to church, but that they listen to the message. That first of all they go to a Mission-Home, and from there to the parish

Assembly, remembering their cultural background of religious syncretism, which makes it a slow process. But the first steps have been taken towards knowledge of, sympathy with, and adhesion to the Church, at the same time learning of and admiring her service to the poor.

- Education in liturgy ... learning to celebrate.
- Responsible organizing of Caritas in a Vincentian style.
- A process for initiating a person into the Community.
- Formation of Lay Missioners through an experience of Faith.

## **The Evangelization Process**

### **A. Every convert lives his Faith on a different level.**

In evangelizing everything is important home visits, chance meeting with people, animating liturgical celebrations, helping the poor, publicly professing the Faith. Normally it follows the following process:

- Meeting an individual believer.
- Concrete and progressive Gospel announcement.
- Invitation to the Faith, and follow-up.
- Joining a community (or Mission-Home), and the companionship of the Evangelizer.
- Invitation to help in service to the poor.
- Invitation to receive the Sacraments.
- And always: Follow-up and encouragement to be a witness to what one has discovered and believes.

### **B. Times for the Mission:**

1. Advent
2. Lent
3. Summer

### **C. Organization during the big Mission:**

1. Calling in all the Communities. The more committed ones will respond immediately; others will simply sign up and wait.
2. Short course of preparation for the Missioners: following the Message and Objectives corresponding to this phase of the Mission.
3. Sending-out ceremony for the Missioners on the first Sunday.
4. Carrying out the Mission according to the planned objectives.

### **D. The effectiveness of the big Mission depends on the home visits: The Announcement, and finding the poor and abandoned.**

- Daily Mass is celebrated, but only for the Missioners.
- Many of the Missioners, because of their jobs, can only give a half day to the Mission.
- Lunch together, followed by evaluation, and go out again.
- At day's end each responsible gives a report to the Mission Director.

Each missioner carries:

- the sign of a Christian, the cross

- the Bible
- a notebook
- handouts with mission information.

### **Growth in the Parish Community**

- Number of Missioners: from 62 in the first phase to 212 in the ninth.
- Number of communities: from one to ten.
- Number of youths: from none to 40.
- Number of Mission-Homes: from none to 52, and 10 more starting.

### **Observations**

Under the framework of the New Evangelization: "New methods - New audacities!"

- A. *All previous Mission styles are changed, because of the fact that we remain three years or more in a parish...*
- With daily homilies at Mass.
    - Constant insistence on creating Communities and Mission-homes.
  - Mission style catechesis of children.
  - Youth pastoral, in continual evolution.
  - Constant attention to the sick.
  - Courageous recruitment of Evangelizers.

B. *To carry out our style of Mission:*

Since our church is in a "State of Mission," according to our Bishops ...

This manner of Mission enables itinerant missionaries to begin and motivate each phase, as they have already done in three of our Missions.

### **Finally:**

The experience has not finished. We now begin the second part, which will go until 2000.

We are celebrating the Golden Anniversary of the construction of the church of Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, and we believe that with what has been accomplished by the Mission we are ready and able to begin constructing a *new Church of the Miraculous Medal*, this time of "*Living Stones!*"

Our Objective:

"The Commitment of 2000 believers to keep alive and functioning our Church-Community, with everyone occupied in some Lay Ministry.

- Continuing the formation of communities.
- Forming Vincentian Volunteers, groups which foster Vincentian spirituality and practice it daily.

We believe that what we have always called Popular Mission is beginning now, but in a country which is in a "State of Mission."

# **Renewed Parish Mission Model in a North American Context**

*John P. Cawley, C.M.  
Southern Province USA*

## **I DEVELOPING A TRADITION OF THE RENEWED POPULAR MISSION:**

In order to understand the present renewed popular mission model which we are promoting in my province we need to study some of the history of the Community in North America. The first members of the Congregation of the Mission were invited to the United States in 1816 to establish a major seminary for the training of native diocesan priests. Until recent years, a high percentage of our confreres were expected to receive advanced degrees in various theological and secular areas of study. These confreres were then assigned to serve as professors in the many diocesan seminaries staffed by the Congregation and as faculty members of three Vincentian Catholic Universities in New York City, Chicago and near Buffalo, New York. (1) From the beginning of the establishment of the Congregation in the United States there were always some confreres in each province assigned by their Provincial to preach the traditional one week parish mission, especially during Advent and Lent. However, the Redemptorists, Passionists, Dominicans, Franciscans and Jesuits were more widely known than Vincentians for their popular missions in the United States except along the East Coast. With the implementation of the decrees of the Second Vatican Council in our country the practice of preaching one week parish missions almost disappeared. Many of you belong to provinces where the tradition preaching popular missions has always been a major ministry.

Since the Vatican Council each of the five American provinces has experimented with a variety of models of popular missions or "parish missions" based on the special conditions in their region. The Southern Province to which I belong is a small missionary province located in the states of Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, New Mexico, Oklahoma and Arkansas. This area in square kilometers is larger than the total area in square kilometers of France, Spain, and Germany! Aside from the large urban dioceses of New Orleans, Dallas, Houston, San Antonio and Santa Fe, almost all the dioceses in this region are small, rural, and missionary. In many counties (districts) the Catholics compose five percent (5%) to perhaps twenty percent (20%) of the total population.

Over the past twenty years the members of my province, most of whom were seminary professors, have made a decision to work more directly in the evangelization of the poor, especially the more abandoned. This has not been an easy decision for our confreres, especially those advanced in age. We have voluntarily withdrawn from teaching in diocesan seminaries. We have turned over middle class parishes to the diocesan clergy. Despite our small number of confreres we have initiated new evangelizing ministries among the indigenous Native Americans living in Arizona. In the northern part of Arkansas we have established a Multi Cultural Ministry Team to work with the recently arrived Spanish speaking immigrants from Latin

America. Because a large number of the poor in our whole region are immigrant families who speak Spanish it has become necessary for the members of our province to learn Spanish. The confreres of the provinces of Mexico, Central America, Puerto Rico, Panama and Cuba have been most helpful in providing our members with opportunities to learn the Spanish language and to work in their apostolates. The basic model we use in our province flows from the study weeks and publications provided for by the Conference of Latin American Visitors (CLAPVI) as well as the manuals for preaching popular missions published by individual provinces of Latin America.

## **II BASIC STRUCTURE OF THE RENEWED POPULAR MISSION:**

In general, our model of the popular mission consists in six to eight weeks of intensive planning and preparation called the PRE-MISSION. The second stage is a one week intensive celebration of mission preaching along with the communal celebrations of the Sacrament of Penance and the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick. The MISSION PREACHING WEEK begins with the Sunday celebrations of the Eucharist on one weekend and closes the following weekend at all the Sunday masses. Then follows a very important six to eight week stage called the POST MISSION. During the final stage of the Post Mission great emphasis is placed on the implementation of permanent changes in the structure of the parish in the areas of liturgy, religious education, small basic communities and family life education. In our country the territorial parish structure is well developed.

Most pastoral services and ministries are carried on through the local neighborhood parish community. Therefore, in order to assure that the major goals of renewal and reform called for by the Second Vatican Council are implemented on the local level a major concern is the spiritual and pastoral renewal of the local diocesan priests, permanent deacons, and all the key pastoral agents of the parish. Members of the Parish Pastoral Council, Parish Finance Council, Worship Commission, Education Commission are expected to participate in the pastoral activities of the Pre-Mission and the Post Mission.

## **III RESPONDING TO CONCRETE NEEDS:**

The celebration of a Popular Mission in a first world country provides great contrasts. On the positive side, the overwhelming majority of our citizens publicly admit that they believe in a personal god. Many also claim they pray regularly. We enjoy full freedom of religion and may actively evangelize without obstacles. Among our active Catholic members are some of the richest persons in our country and also some of the poorest persons in our country. The Catholic Church is the only major Christian denomination which includes members from every race, every language group, and every economic class. On the negative side, we serve people who are often times preoccupied with their own careers, their own greed, and their own comfort. Because we are now all part of a world wide economy there has been a loss of jobs in my country. The rich investors are becoming richer and the poor workers are becoming poorer. Well educated Catholics with their family origins in Europe form the best educated group of our citizens and have enormous secular influence in the areas of commerce, politics, the universities and the law. Nevertheless, the practice of religion as a Christian, including Catholic Christians, is a private, personal, family matter in our culture and is not to be a part of your professional

work or job. There is great pressure to keep the practice of our faith and our Catholic values private. At the other end of spectrum we also have thousands of poor recently arrived immigrants from Asia, Africa, Latin America, Caribbean and Eastern Europe. At times all these groups may live in the same area and are members of the same territorial parish. Therefore, in the selection of sites to preach popular missions we Vincentians in the United States serve a mixed audience. A major theme in our preaching is the call to build bridges between the economic classes and to be "catholic" with a small "c" as well as a capital "C".

#### **IV OVERALL CONTENT AND THEMES:**

In 1992 the Catholic Bishops' Conference issued a comprehensive national plan for evangelization entitled: "Go and Make Disciples". The first goal is to create in all North American Catholics an enthusiasm for their faith, a living faith in Jesus, and a desire to share this faith with other persons. The second goal calls Catholics to invite all persons of all classes and races to hear the message of Jesus Christ with the hope that they would hear the message of salvation and unite with us in the fullness of the Catholic Faith. The third and final goal is to promote the values of the Gospel in our society, promote the dignity of every human person, the importance of the family, and the common good of our society so our country might be transformed by the saving power of Jesus Christ. (2) All of the content of our mission preaching and all the specific activities planned in the three stages of the Vincentian Popular Mission flow from these three goals.

The Mission Preaching Week begins with a personal call to accept Jesus Christ as our Savior. As Catholic Christians we place emphasis on our call to a deeper conversion within the Christian Community, the mystical body of Christ. Our personal experience of forgiveness of sins takes place as our personal relationship with Jesus is strengthened. As we are healed by Christ the Divine Healer we are challenged to become an active part of an evangelizing and reconciling community. In my country, this reconciling community is found in the local parish Eucharistic Community.

#### **V SPECIAL CHALLENGES TO THE NEW CATHOLIC EVANGELIZATION:**

Now I would like to share with you some concerns which can have an application in your country and your particular culture. In North America a Vincentian promoter of the new Catholic evangelization is faced with serious challenges from the powerful influence of a secular popular culture and the missionary activities of Fundamentalist and Evangelical church groups. In my country our people, especially the young adults and children, are bombarded on a daily basis at home by the media. Violence is glorified. The gift of human sexuality is presented in a self-centered and pleasure seeking way. Greed and the accumulation of wealth are offered as the important goals in life. Happiness is found in instant gratification of all our desires. By means of satellites, cable television, videos, magazines, newspapers and popular modern music, the heroes of ruthless capitalism, sports, and entertainment are presented as models of success to be imitated and admired. Thanks to modern technology of communication these same messages will be having an impact on your people, especially your students and young workers.

In most English speaking industrialized countries the majority of baptized Christians are not Catholics! We have lived for centuries as a minority community with our neighbors of the

Protestant Reform Tradition. In recent decades the Fundamentalists and Evangelical church groups, along with the Jehovah Witnesses and Mormons, have developed well planned and well coordinated missionary activities. Many of these projects are directed to minimally educated local residents and the recently arrived immigrants from other countries.

In ever growing numbers Fundamentalist and Evangelical missionaries will begin visiting the homes of Catholic families in Europe, Latin America, Oceania, Asia and Africa. In our mission planning and carrying out activities we Vincentian evangelizers can learn many positive lessons from the secular popular culture and from Fundamentalists and Evangelical missionaries.

From the secular media we can learn that our message must be clear, simple, and presented in an attractive and positive way. People today are influenced by the images they see and the sounds they hear. The way the message of Jesus Christ is presented is crucial.

Our people, especially our students and young workers, have a well developed sense of what is interesting and what is boring from their contact with the media. Our publicity promoting the activities of the Popular Mission and all our materials, including videos, cassettes, posters, pamphlets, need to be of THE SAME TECHNICAL QUALITY as the materials broadcasted and distributed by the secular world of commerce, sports and entertainment.

As you already know Fundamentalist and Evangelical missionaries place great importance on personal contact with the individual person. They are eager to offer a personal invitation to come to know and to love Jesus Christ. In my country Evangelical Christians address me and also their companions with the title of "brother" or "sister" along with their baptismal name. Their Sunday celebrations are well attended. These communities are famous for their good hospitality, their good homilies and their good hymns.

There are still pastoral leaders in my country who believe that Catholics who have left the Catholic Church, especially among our Spanish speaking, to join the Evangelicals, Fundamentalists and the Mormons are still really "Catholic" and one day will return to the Catholic Church. Our experience in my province is that after one generation of good biblical preaching, good religious education, and good community spirit as an Evangelical, these former Catholics and their children will not return to the Catholic Church. In fact, they become effective evangelizers among their Catholic family members.

## **VI THE IMPORTANCE OF A WELL CELEBRATED STAGE OF PRE-MISSION:**

In our province our preachers are convinced that a well planned and well coordinated period of six to eight weeks of Pre-Mission activity is the single most important ingredient to assure the success of a Popular Mission. The Vincentian missionaries and the local evangelizers will encounter much resistance to change and a fear to try new pastoral strategies. In our province we make our initial contact with diocesan officials or the pastors of a region from twelve to eighteen months in advance. In some areas the decision may be made as much as two years in advance. You know well the importance of having the clear, public, and enthusiastic support of the local bishop and local pastors of the region for the three stages of the Popular Mission.

As Vincentian missionaries we run the risk of always preaching to members of the parish choir! The Parish Mission Team will be challenged to invite new persons to be part of the Pre-

Mission activities. We can no longer be content with the familiar faces at Sunday and weekday masses. The most difficult task we face in the months of preparation in the Pre-Mission is to mobilize the energy and time of the core of active Catholic parishioners to become evangelizers to their neighbors. The Vincentian missionary who serves as an advisor to the parish priests and the members of the parish mission planning team must insist that the Vincentian missionaries are here to "accompany" and assist the local pastoral agents. The local parishioners, especially the lay leaders, move from being receivers of the Word of God to sharers of the Word of God.

## **VII SPECIFIC SUGGESTIONS FOR PRE-MISSION:**

The following suggestions are offered to stimulate your imagination and to promote greater creativity among the members of the Popular Mission Team in your province. In some areas of your province there may not be an abundance of technical equipment for broadcasting on television and radio and for printing materials. However, there are other local artistic, musical and literary resources which your team can use. Obviously, there will need to be adjustments made due to the unique, cultural, economic, political and religious conditions of your homeland.

\*Well disciplined planning team: The local pastors and representatives of the pastoral agents and key lay leaders form part of the planning team. They begin their work about four months before the opening of the Mission Preaching Week. Special attention is given to members from among the young adults, youth, and any particular language groups.

\* Emphasis on Holy Scripture: Missionaries of other Christian groups may portray the Catholic Church as a church against the Holy Scriptures! The simple response is to make much use of the Holy Scripture in our preaching and in our printed materials during the Pre-Mission. Simple inexpensive selections or portions of the Scriptures, especially the New Testament, can be distributed as part of the home visits.

\* Creative use of the calendar: The actual dates of the Pre-Mission are developed in a full calendar of events leading up to the Special Mission Preaching Week. Where possible the penitential seasons of Advent and Lent and the feasts of Christmas and Easter can provide a clear structure for the popular mission. The use of the liturgical year calendar works well in the countries of the northern hemisphere. At the same time the rhythm of the educational, agricultural and holiday calendar of your country needs to be considered. In some cases, the last weeks of the school holidays work well for home visiting and social activities during the Pre-Mission.

\* Messengers of the Lord: One of the most effective ways to assure wide participation by the local parishioners in the Pre-Mission is to develop a group of adults and young adults to serve as home visitors and street ministers. Working in groups of two persons these Messengers of the Lord visit homes, chat with young people at sports fields, and other locations in the community where adults and young people gather to recreate.

After several sessions of training on how to make a home visit, offer a personal invitation to participate, the Messengers are commissioned at Sunday mass after the homily. Each messenger

receives his or her own distinctive missionary cross or other simple symbol to wear on his or her clothing.

\* Provisional Basic Community Groups: At the beginning of the Pre-Mission the Messengers of the Lord and other active adult and young adult Catholics are invited to join a small basic community. The groups will meet once a week for eight sessions. Members may form a group in the same geographical area or a group based on similar interests or ages. The reading of the Gospel for the next Sunday as well as some simple questions for reflection and discussion are offered. Family members and friends who have no particular affiliation with any church are invited to attend one time. If they like the experience they are welcome to return.

\*Promotion of the Mission/Publicity Committee: The missionaries invite a variety of local pastoral agents, active laity, and even non-Catholics to join the committee. Representatives of the local newspapers, radio, television, and companies who print materials may be invited to donate technical assistance. In countries which have been overwhelmingly Roman Catholic by culture and tradition there may be objections to the need to publicize our activities as do the Evangelicals and Mormons. If the potential audience you wish to contact among the middle class, the workers, the university students and farm workers are not regularly attending Sunday mass in the parish church, then the Pre-Mission team members and Messengers of the Lord need to go and visit them where they live, study, work and recreate. This is not easy to do for many missionaries and lay colleagues.

\* Concern for non-active baptized Catholics: These residents already have the grace of Baptism to assist them in a new adult decision to accept Jesus Christ. Home visits and invitation to join in parish social and athletic activities during the Pre-Mission are important points of personal contact with the local Faith Community.

\* Non-baptized / non affiliated residents: A variety of recreational, athletic, social events sponsored by the parish community during the Pre-Mission can stimulate the curiosity of these non-baptized persons. An invitation to a well celebrated Liturgy of the Word with small group interaction allows new contact and exposure with Catholics outside the formal setting of the Sunday Eucharist. A popular event is the "Curious about Catholics" program. Participants can ask questions in written form and a missionary responds to these questions and difficulties with the Catholic Faith in a positive and non inditing manner.

## **VIII THE RENEWED POPULAR MISSION AS A STIMULUS TO THE NEW CATHOLIC EVANGELIZATION:**

Pope John Paul II, in his encyclical letter on the missionary mandate of Christ, offers us a structure for own missionary activity in the revitalization of local churches and regional churches in which we serve. The Christian witness of individual Catholics and local Catholic Communities is a key ingredient. (3) A renewed model of the Popular Mission can serve as a stimulus in the promotion of the new Catholic evangelization on the parish and regional level. When individual Catholics and parishes communities of faith are revitalized there are also

renewed possibilities to reach out to those persons living in our midst who do not yet know Jesus Christ.

Following the reform of the Liturgy called for by the Second Vatican Council, the Holy See promulgated a new Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults in 1972. Various National Conferences of Bishops around the world have made local cultural adaptations to the rite and approved the revised rite for their respective nations. (4)

This past Holy Saturday at the Easter Vigil more than 30,000 adults were received into the Catholic Church in my country. Many of them had spent two years of study, prayer, and apostolic service before receiving the sacraments of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. Thousands of other baptized, but non catechized, adult Catholics also completed their personal journey to full membership in the Church. Based on the interviews of these new Catholics, the great majority were attracted to the Catholic Church by the good example of family members, friends and fellow students and workers. They found the support they needed to join the Catholic Church in their local parishes where there were vibrant celebrations of the liturgy and the promotion of a sense of community.

The structure, the steps of conversion, and the individual rites and prayers found in the Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA) are a rich resource for personal prayer, reflection and planning a popular mission program. The three stages of the North American model of the Popular Mission deliberately incorporate the key themes and prayers from the revised Rite of Christian Initiation (RCIA) as approved by our Bishops' Conference. The first stage of the Pre-Mission includes an emphasis on basic evangelization and an inquiry about the beliefs of the Catholic Church. During the time of intensive missionary preaching and study the participants are invited to journey in the spirit of a catechumen and to study our beliefs as part of a call to conversion. At this time there is a fresh invitation to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance and once again share in the sacrament of the Eucharist with the parish assembly. In the third stage of Post Mission the revitalized Catholic makes a fresh commitment to share in the ministries of liturgy, catechesis, and apostolic service along with the newly baptized and confirmed Neophytes in the tradition of the period of Mystagogy.

For non baptized persons or baptized Christians of other communities, there is a warm welcome to join the parish community for Sunday Eucharist as they begin their own journey to the Easter Vigil at the end of Lent of the following year.

As fellow missionaries in the Vincentian Family throughout the world may we all be enriched by our sharing of models and missionary experiences during these days. Thank you.

- (1) The American Vincentians. A Popular History of the Congregation of the Mission 1815-1987. Editorial Staff Vincentian Studies Institute, Los Angeles, 1988.
- (2) "Go Make Disciples", National Plan of Evangelization, USA National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, D.C., 1992.
- (3) Redemptoris Missio, Pope John Paul II, Vatican City, 1990.
- (4) "Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA)," USA National Conference of Catholic Bishops, Washington, D.C., 1988.

## OPENING REFLECTION

*Luis María Martínez San Juan, C.M.*

I want to begin by giving the definition of the word “pastoral” a Vincentian twist. This definition will focus this presentation like a light from above: **Pastoral** is any effort to reach Christ because he has reached you first (the work of one's own sanctification); one can only live and find this power in a community (the place of encounter with Christ), that has received this mandate: *Follow me, be my witnesses and go and make my disciples...(proper end).*

This definition offers us the three key elements of Evangelization. And these components constitute our spirit:

[1] The Mission is not our work. It is Christ who has chosen and sent us. And .. *how sorry we will be if we do not announce his gospel!*

[2] The Church and the world need us to make the Gospel real; to live out the command of Jesus: *As the Father has sent me, so I also send you.* Saint Vincent proposes similar words of Jesus to us: *He has sent me to preach the good news to the poor (Cons.5).*

[3] This desire cannot be lived out alone, but only in community. "Each and every one of its members (of the Congregation) dare to say with Jesus: *I have to proclaim the Gospel. It is for this that I have been sent. (Luke 4:43) (Cons. 10).*

For this reason, our community "can affirm of itself, as all the Church does, but in a special way, that the mission to evangelize constitutes our community's very own grace and particular vocation and expresses its true nature." (Cf. EN 14) (Cf. Cons.10)

The Vincentian mission to the people has its place in the general pastoral work of the Church. But, be careful, this position does not come to us as easily as rain from heaven; no one is going to give it to us. We have to seek it. We have to look for it and find it if we want to survive.

Some time ago, our previous Vicar General, P. Flores, commented to me: *The Church will never disappear as charism or as institution: the Lord himself has assured us of this. But the congregation can disappear in its charism and institution. Not only is this possible, but it has actually happened historically to others. We cannot sleep. We need to work and look for our niche. We have come together here for this very reason.*

We also need to search for and find our own place in a specific way: in the style that Saint Vincent began, *adapting ourselves to the circumstances of the peoples, the places and the times (I,227/I,274).*

## I. TO SITUATE OURSELVES CORRECTLY

We came here restless. We desire to make the proclamation of the good news credible to people today: people living in diverse circumstances and diverse cultures. Some define this evangelical task as a movement outward. The dynamic "going out" began with God. With his *bending down to Humanity, he begins the History of our Salvation: Jesus leaves heaven, renounces everything, descends and comes to us on our level, the level of simple people.*

This dynamism, initiated by God, and carried through in the course of the History of the Church, urges us today to leave our native place and to incarnate ourselves in other cultures. Then we live a double fidelity:

*A fidelity to all humanity to which we direct ourselves and a fidelity to the treasure that we have received and whose servants we are; a treasure we carry in vessels of clay, but which the power of the Gospel makes capable of reaching out and transforming the criteria of judgment, the points of interest, the lines of thought, the fountains of inspiration, and the models of life for all humanity" (EN19).*

So let us begin the work of this Vincentian month faithful to the suggestions of the majority of us made through the process of **dialogue**. As we recall from above, we want, with Saint Vincent, **to look at the reality**. Through his awareness of the reality, Vincent heard God's voice calling him **back to the mission** through the call of some poor country people, the *call of the poor and abandoned*.

Here, today, we intend to do the same. God continues to call us through our people. We must listen to God's voice today. Let us turn our eyes and minds to the reality. I am sure that God wants to tell us many interesting things through the crowds of people and places we represent.

## II. TO LOOK AT AND SEE OURSELVES

It is clear that we should begin the work of **looking at and seeing ourselves**. Immersed in our own **worlds**, we can focus ourselves on three vistas: our own little world, the places in which we serve the Church, and our Communities and Provincial teams.

(1) The **world**. And not the whole world, but rather our **little world** -- those human contexts in which we live, as well as the concrete situation of our people and their need for evangelization, their hopes...

As Vatican Council II proclaims:

*The people of God, moved by a faith which impels them to believe that it is the Spirit of the Lord that fills the universe and that leads God's People, seeks to discern in **the events, demands and desires** of those who participate jointly with their contemporaries, the true signs of the presence and plans of God. Faith illumines everything with a new light and manifests the divine plan for the total vocation of humanity. For this reason, faith orients the mind toward full human solutions." (GS11).*

As long as we do not stay on a superficial level, but allow ourselves to look into the depths, perhaps we will be able to discern the true signs of the presence of God and God's plans in the events, requests and desires that we experience. To do this, we must dialogue. There is a saying in my country, "Four eyes see better than two". Let us then look at our worlds together.

Real history is the **theological place** where we hear the *call of God* and **encounter Him**. It is the place where the decision is made to follow him. It is interesting to recognize the voices that help us feel that call of God: "*I have seen the oppression of my people..., I have heard your complaints against your oppressors, I have seen your suffering... And now, go and free them*"(Ex 3,7ss). For this reason, we can begin by asking:

What are the most urgent needs of evangelization for our people? Where do we perceive them to be?

What are the saddest and most difficult situations of our people that the mission might help them overcome? (This requires more than just "preaching" a mission.)

What are the situations of darkness that are in need of the light of the Gospel?

(2) The **Church** is called to give life to the real world. The Church in the world and the local particular churches live their own realities *in light and in shadow*. Saint Vincent also encountered a Church full of light and shadow. Because he loved the Church so much, and he recognized its imperfections, he worked to transform the Church. He offered a solution.

Through *the light and shadow* that we see in our church, we are being asked for an answer. Before formulating new questions, let me to remind you of some of the situations that Saint Vincent knew and dealt with. Perhaps they might be similar to ours:

a) The first situation that stumped Saint Vincent was **the people's lack of knowledge:**

*You will really experience the ignorance of the people, an incredible ignorance... How can a poor soul believe, or hope, or love God when that person does not know God nor what God has done for him because of his love. And how will such a person be saved without faith, without hope, without love? Well then, God, seeing the needs and calamities caused by the times and the negligence of pastors and the heresies by which they have caused great damage to the Church, has desired, because of his great mercy, to remedy all this by means of the missionaries, sending them to the poor people so they can save themselves." (XI,80- 81/XI, 387-388)*

Isn't this happening today when the powerful mass media create false hopes of safety in the hearts of the people?

b) Let us continue with Saint Vincent:

*I have another consideration: the need the church has for some good priests who can do away with so much ignorance and so many vices of those on earth. Such priests could free the Church of this lamentable condition, about which good souls ought to be crying with tears of blood. (XII, 85/XI, 392)*

Isn't it true today that while the poor need the light of the Gospel, they do not **find the real answers** they need in our churches? Can't we recognize the urgent needs that cry out to us as missionaries?

c) Another important point, and a burning issue for an authentic missionary who wants to live like Jesus who *spoke, preached, and also acted (Acts 1,1)* is this: What is the level of the Christian commitment to the most needy? Saint Vincent continues to offer us new challenges. Saint Vincent affirms with clarity: *To evangelize in word and deed is the most perfect thing we can do; it is what our Lord does and it is what those who represent him in this world have to do.* (XI,89-90/XI,393)

*It could happen that after my death some people motivated by a spirit of contradiction or comfort might ask: "Why bother taking care of these hospitals? How can you care for these persons ruined by the war and why seek for them in their homes? Why take on so many problems of so many poor people? Why direct the women who care for the sick, and why waste your time with crazy people?" There will be some who will criticize these works, don't doubt it. Others will say that it is too ambitious to send missionaries to far away countries... We should just give missions right here; there is enough to do here without going so far away; I want to be busy here. Don't talk to me about abandoned children, nor about old people in the name of Jesus, nor about those prisoners!* (XII,89-90/XI 393)

These texts of Saint Vincent indicate the direction that our discussions could follow. Questions about the Church should come from the need for salvation discovered in our own little worlds. We could discuss the following questions.

We have discovered the search for salvation in our little worlds. So we ask:

What answers are our churches giving?

What answers are we, the children of St. Vincent, giving?

Should we be giving different answers? (Which? How?)

We can focus on positive answers as well as our deficiencies. And at this point, we could focus on the real condition of the parishes or communities where we will give missions.

(3) Our third focus is "to observe" and it touches us very closely. We have to look at ourselves. We have to examine our communities, our Provinces and the answers we are giving today as children of Saint Vincent. We have to take long hard look at our Missionary Teams. Are we giving convincing, Christian, Vincentian answers to the problems mentioned above?

Paul VI in the *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, speaking about evangelization, shares some thoughts we cannot ignore.

*It has been repeated frequently in our days that this century is thirsting for authenticity. Above all, with relation to the youth, it is affirmed that they are horrified by the fictitious, by falsehood, and are decidedly in line with the truth and sincerity. These signs of the times ought to make us resonate with a vigilant attitude. Quietly or with loud shouts, but always with strength, it is asked of us: Do you really believe what you are announcing? Do you live out what you believe? Do you really live what you teach? Today more than ever, the witness of our lives has become an essential condition of preaching effectively. Without*

*going in circles, we can say that in a certain measure, we make ourselves responsible for the gospel that we proclaim. (EN76)*

The thought of Paul VI coincides not surprisingly with that of Saint Vincent. We see how he put his finger right on the sore spot of some of the problems that existed right from the beginning. A man of great ideals such as he could not but help to point out these negative realities:

*We look for the shade; we don't like to go out in the sun. We like our comfort so much! In the mission, for example, we are in the church, protected from the wrath of time, protected from the heat of the sun, from the rain, everything to which the poor people are exposed. And we shout asking for help when we are given a little more work to do out of the ordinary! My room, my books, my Mass! Is this what it means to be a missionary - to have all these comforts? We live on the patrimony of Jesus Christ, with the sweat of the poor. We should go to the dining room thinking: "Have I earned the food that I am about to eat?" (XI,201/XI,120-121)*

A missionary work can fail from its origin because of the lack of zeal for the salvation of all humanity. Without this zeal, we are simply the "corpses of missionaries." Without this missionary zeal, we would lack our "identity." This Vincentian month intends to return us to our roots and make us drink of the fresh fountains of the evangelizing and missionary spirit. We listen again to Saint Vincent as he says,

*I know quite well how this was being done at the beginning of the little company, how we followed exactly the practice of not letting any opportunity pass by to teach the poor".../I/)*

With this motivation that gives us as much from *Evangelii Nuntiandi* as from Saint Vincent, we can enter into a new field of analysis and dialogue. Are we content with just saying it, or are we really "evangelizers of the poor"? How would anyone know that we are dedicated to evangelize the poor, above all the most abandoned? (Cons.1,2)

- As Vincentians, we are called to give some answers to the problems in our society. And what is the real response we should make in regard to the vision of the future for the Mission in our Provinces?
- How do we see ourselves? How do we see our lives in relationship to our goals?

Why don't we make a self portrait? Let us try to do it!

It's possible that the problem of "what we do" is not related to ill will or laziness. It's possible that we find real difficulties in doing good things. Why do we not talk about the zeal we should have in our missionary dedication? It is worth our while to speak about the problems and difficulties that we are facing.

- What are the real difficulties we discover in the concrete situations where we announce the good news to the poor?
- Can we identify the causes of these difficulties?

### III. PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS

Let us now think about our linguistic groups. In order to make the dialogue most effective, I want to make some practical observations.

1. This first dialogue ought to bring us to a most profound awareness of our real worlds: successes, dreams, desires, problems, failings, hopes... Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to note that the theme is so broad that we do not have enough time -- even 17 hours wouldn't be enough. That is why we ask that you not spend too much time on the small details that are not so important, but that you go right to the core. This afternoon, when we come back to the Plenary Session it will be good to communicate the more significant experiences. Lesser details, as important as they maybe, we can leave for the informal discussions that will surely be one of the pleasures of our time together.

2. Another observation. In our discussions, we should not focus only on negative aspects. There might even be groups that in honest analysis do not find any negative aspects. Perhaps we can affirm that we are doing all that we can. God does not demand more than what we can honestly do.

It is important that, if this is so, we share this also with the rest. The negative realities that we observe as we make an examination of our real worlds should only move us to correct them. A sincere self-evaluation is the first step on the road to conversion.

But we need to know and see all the good that God is doing through our simple sincere efforts and works. Like Mary, we have to know how to thank God for all the great things he does with us.

3. This first discussion is important in the total concept of this month. We must try to give some answers during this month to the needs and inquiries that come out spontaneously in the discussion of the groups.

On the other hand, we will make known to the Father General, and to the confreres of our Provinces and our Missionary Teams, what we learn here from the missionary sense of the participants about the real worlds in which we labor.

4. Finally, I want to point out the fact that the plan we offer has only one objective: to help and facilitate dialogue. The questions in this presentation are not questions on an examination. For that reason, each group should treat what I've said and the questions I suggest with freedom. Find in your concrete and diverse experience, without spending too much time in them, the most interesting questions to put forth for discussion among us all.

Luis María Martínez San Juan, C.M.

English Translation: Arthur Kolinsky, C.M.  
Panama

## **Preparation for the mission (Pre-mission)**

*Bi-lingual Mission Team: John Kennedy and Arthur Kolinsky  
Eastern USA Province*

This paper will attempt to describe the "Pre-Mission" routine we have developed as a preliminary to an actual mission, which is usually directed to the Faithful of a parish with a large population of Spanish-speaking immigrants. There are two main sections: 1. Preparation of the team. 2. Preparation of each parish.

### **Preparation of the mission team**

At the meeting of Vincentian Visitors in Bogota in January 1983, with its main theme, "Popular Missions," renewed interest in our primary function as Vincentians, the Evangelization of the poor, was very evident. The Philadelphia Province shortly afterwards responded by assigning a few confreres to a "Parish Renewal" team, which met with immediate success. Then, in 1985 the Provincial, Jerry Mahoney, decided that we should be into evangelizing one of the largest and neediest groups of Christians in the U.S., Hispanic immigrants. He asked Fathers John Kennedy and Art Kolinsky to begin this work, since both spoke Spanish.

To prepare ourselves for this apostolate we first visited the Catholic Committee for Hispanics in its three regional headquarters that correspond to the geographical limits of our Province:

- New York - Northeast
- Miami - Southeast
- South Bend - Midwest

These visits proved very productive. First of all, the directors in each area were pleased to see that the Vincentians were anxious to participate in the Spanish-speaking apostolate. And secondly, we were given a lot of helpful advice as well as names of Bishops they knew would welcome us to their dioceses.

Our next step was to visit the dioceses recommended to us: Brooklyn, Rockville Center, New York, Allentown, Miami, Venice, Tampa, Kalamazoo, in all of which we subsequently gave missions. Besides these, as the word spread about this newest Vincentian activity, and answering calls from Vincentian confreres in other Provinces, during the next few years we had missions in the dioceses of Brownsville, Midland-Odessa, Chicago, and Los Angeles. Latin American invitations also reached us, resulting in a six-year commitment (three months each year) to Panama, where our own Tom Sendlein was National Director of "La Mision Nacional," which reached every corner of the country and involved priests, religious and thousands of laity, between 1988 and 1993. And in 1994 and 1995 we directed missions to outlying areas of the Dominican Republic.

So, having targeted areas for our missions, we learned techniques from observing how our English Renewal Team (Tom Krafinski's) performed, and getting reports from Spanish-speaking provinces, mainly Colombia, we decided our own preparation was adequate to begin working. So we began.

## **Preparation for the mission**

To prepare a parish for a Mission we try to visit it several months ahead of time. This is not always possible, especially where the parish is far away, like in California, while we are busy with Missions in New York! But we usually manage to make a preliminary visit, often only one of us, in order to get the remote preparations underway.

The first and basic preparation is always directed at the priests of the parish. And since we almost always go to parishes recommended to us by Diocesan Hispanic Directors, we have found clergy happy to see us, willing to listen to our plan, and ready to roll up their sleeves and take active part in the Mission itself. (How different from past days, when a pastor would take advantage of the Missioner's presence to get away for a little vacation!)

Once sure of the cooperation of the parish priests, and with their cooperation, we outline the plan of the Mission, accentuating the role of the laity, and ask for a meeting with the members of the parish. We explain to them that it is their mission not ours, and they, not us will make it or break it. If we have the good fortune to make this first visit over a weekend, we go to all the Sunday Masses, announce the Mission, give them the dates, and make a general call for volunteers. Knowing that not all parishioners will want to be active Mission workers, we give them an option: We pass out cards, ask them to sign them with name and address, and indicate their choice: they can opt to be Missioners who go out to the streets and visit homes with us - or be "Mission Prayers," promising to pray every day of the Mission for their friends and neighbors who are out visiting homes, as, in Jesus' words, "Fishers of Men."

Catholics in the U.S. are accustomed to having their doorbells rung by Evangelicals, Mormons, and Jehovah's Witnesses. But not by other Catholics. So a few good sessions of instruction and animation, are necessary at this point. We urge them to bone up on their basic Catholic doctrine, in case they run across serious inquirers, but not to enter into any polemics. They are told that the main purpose of our door to door campaigning is to invite people to the Mission, not to proselytize. They visit as friends and neighbors. And these preliminary meetings are calculated to impress them with this conviction.

Since we usually cannot be in a parish at this time of preparation we ask the pastor if he can arrange for some good lay person, or a religious, or even himself!, to do the job. We have never met with a refusal, and almost always, on arrival at the parish for the Mission, find an enthusiastic corps of Missioners awaiting our arrival. Most places have from forty to sixty volunteers ready to "hit the streets." We have had places where upwards of eighty have helped out.

## **Final preparation**

We always try to get to a parish a few days before the Mission begins, when we meet every evening with the team for the last preparatory sessions. Since our team aims at parishes where Hispanics are numerous, often the majority, the mission volunteers usually reflect by their numbers the ethnic make-up of the parish. And the Mission itself must take such statistics into account. We instruct the missioners to be ready to meet both Spanish and English speaking families, and to tell them that there will be something for everybody during the days of the Mission.

These final preps often get to be like college "pep rallies"! We even have some dynamics prepared to use, like little skits to illustrate how they should act when visiting homes. Some of the volunteers are asked to play the part of different types of families: good Catholics, indifferent Catholics, nominal Christians, Protestants, single parent homes, drunks, lazies, Catholic haters, etc. Others play the visiting Mission team, knocking on imaginary doors, greeting the dwellers, and taking it from there! This has proved to be an effective and enjoyable way to prepare people who are essentially very timid about broaching the subject of religion to strangers.

The climax of our preparation phase of a Mission takes place on the Sunday the Mission begins. This is the "Commissioning" ceremony. At each of the Sunday Masses we announce who the volunteer Lay Missioners are. After Communion we ask these to come forward, so the parishioners present may see who they are. It is better to do this at each Mass, rather than have all the Missioners together for only one ceremony. In this way everybody in the parish is made aware that something special and extraordinary is about to take place in their parish. Each Missioner is presented a wooden Mission cross to wear suspended from the neck. It is always a proud moment for all, and very often more volunteers come forward asking to join the team!

Even though this paper is limited to the Preparation phase of our Missions, we must allude sketchily to the Mission itself, since to prepare our volunteers they must be aware of exactly to what they are inviting people.

The parish is divided into sectors, each of a few square blocks. The volunteers are formed into teams of three, each group having both English and Spanish speakers. They are given file cards on all the known Catholics in the area they will visit. These visits take place from 6:00 to 9:00 p.m., when folks are usually home from work. On entering a home they present themselves as representatives of the local Catholic Church and invite their hosts to come to the Mission. "And what is the Mission?"

The Missioner answers: "Tomorrow evening at 7:00 there will be a Mass celebrated by Father So-and-so right down the street, in front of the Rodriguez' house. Can you come?"

Such a novel event usually attracts very fine crowds. It is something different. Loudspeakers enable our message to reach many ears. Police often accompany us to control traffic, or even blocking off a street for us so cars will not disturb our Mass!

So our Missioners are told exactly what the Mission will consist in: Visits to homes on Monday night. Street Masses on Tuesday. More visits, on different streets, on Wednesday. More street Masses on Thursday. Friday night a meeting of Missioners to discuss the week's activity.

This plan of action continues for three weeks, plus Saturdays dedicated to youth activities. And then one final week, in the Church, with Liturgy, Reconciliation, Sermons, always a Marian procession, and a closing with a party - music, dancing, tamales, etc., etc., etc.!

# **PRE-MISSION FORMATION OF LAY-MISSIONERS**

*Joaquin González, C.M.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

St. Vincent discovered true religion in the poor: "It is among them, among the poor, where true religion is preserved, true Faith, simple belief" (XI, 200-201; XI, 120).

Led by the spirit we explain the Gospel to simple people, with the desire to "evangelize" with the poor:

In our efforts to prepare Lay Missioners-Animators, we cannot forget this perspective.

It is clear that the Parish Mission, right from its beginning, the Pre-Mission, must include the laity in its projected evangelization: In fact, the planning of the mission cannot be undertaken without including the active participation of the laity: They must be given more authority: They do not know theology, but their lay condition opens doors to both youth and adults with much more facility than the revered Missionary.

On the other hand, the Vincentian mission seeks to make the evangelized at the same time evangelizers, for which it is necessary:

To use existing lay missioners.

To seek new ones.

To make the effort from the very start or preparation, expending both time and energy, in the formation and maturation, Christian and human, of the lay missioner.

Recruiting and preparing of laity to cooperate in the missionary process is a fundamental element of the mission: Such selection and preparation of the lay missioner (visitors, heads of families, group animators) is essential to the success of the mission. It is not easy to find a group of persons with the required human and spiritual qualities, but the effort must be made to make the layman aware of the circumstances.

## **PORTRAIT OF A LAY MISSIONER**

Let us talk about the qualities a lay missioner at this time of evangelization in which the Church finds itself today: Since the lay missioner must, in a greater or less degree, take part in this evangelization, we note some of these qualities:

1. A person united to Christ, by reflection, action, & prayer.
2. Deeply ecclesial: he loves the Church & his parish.
3. Empathetic: He knows and makes his own the problems of the people.
4. Open: knows how to listen, to dialog, to be evangelized.
5. Ready to serve: an attitude of service and interest for all.
6. Instrument of reconciliation: to create unity.
7. Servant and guide: he is not the Center of the Christian community.

8. Animator & mover: Group educator.

## CRITERIA TO KEEP IN MIND FOR FORMING LAY MISSIONERS

The laity must be active and integral to the Mission. It is not enough to be just a good person who can do everything.

The ideal is that the Pre-Mission and the Mission utilize missionaries of the same parish, who will also continue with the post-mission.

So they may collaborate in the entire mission they must be offered means of formation.

The layman must know well the objectives of the Mission; as well as the programming or its different phases.

Preparing lay missionaries is a delicate process, so it should be undertaken by the Mission Team; but always with the support and collaboration of the Parish Priest.

At the end of the Mission it is a good idea to set up a team to take responsibility for its continuance.

Reviewing these criteria, we logically ask: How are we preparing visitors, heads of families, and group animators? What dynamics are we using to assure their adequate formation?

## FUNDAMENTAL REQUIREMENTS FOR FORMING LAY MISSIONERS

The requirements we should be aware of in forming lay missionaries must be the same as those for the formation of catechists; adapting them, however, to a concrete situation and taking into account the human element and time available: And "catechetical formation centers fundamentally on developing the aptitude and capacity for communicating the gospel message." (DCG, 111).

The formation of catechists involves:

Placing the catechist in the evangelizing mission of the Church, and enabling him to undertake totally the life of a Christian today:

With the original pedagogy of the Gospel.

All within an atmosphere of community and dialog.

Which leads him to maturity as a person, a believer, and educator of the faith.

Summing all this: preparing lay missionaries involves:

1. Achieving a basic formation of lay missionaries in the fundamental themes of a parish mission. It is difficult to evangelize and transform them into a missionary community if they have not discovered the nature and objectives of the new missionary perspective.

2. Lay Missioners must be offered the criteria of pastoral pedagogy; especially those treating of communication and personal encounter, since these are the techniques of a pastoral missionary.
3. To aid them who are to be messengers of the Christian message to discover the true biblical and pastoral sense of the Kerigma.
4. Begin the dynamics and animation of the groups which will direct the communities resulting from the experience of the Mission.
5. Create a spirit of adhesion among the Missioners so that their labors will be parish activities and not those of an individual or small group.

### STEPS TO BE TAKEN DURING PREPARATION

A task should not be entrusted to Lay Missioners without helping them to make sense out of what they are going to undertake.

During the pre-Mission, then, we:

- Offer an elemental orientation so they may adequately do their job.
- Awaken and direct their vocation as evangelizers and missioners.
- Encourage a desire for deeper Christian formation.

If one of the objectives and priorities of the Mission is to discover and create Missioners, it is well to pay special attention to this aspect. So:

1. We begin by discussing it with the pastor and the laity who come to the preparation. We see to it that they address the theme right from the beginning of the preparation. Later on, during the serious phase of the Mission, we personally engage in seeking Missioners.
2. Once the group is formed we aid them in overcoming any fears they may have about undertaking a service previously unknown to them, and sometimes of doubtful value in their particular area.
3. We see to it that they take into account the reality of their situation, the objectives of the mission, the basic content of Faith, the techniques for animating groups.
4. They must awaken a conscience of their role as "animators" and "evangelizers," for which we help them develop qualities of openness, acceptance, understanding, simplicity, and a living Faith. We try to make them conscious of the challenges facing evangelization today and the need to join faithfulness to God and to man today.
5. The Pope has asked for a new evangelization that must be really new, and not a mere accommodation or renewal. For evangelization to be new, as John Paul II says, it must be new in its ardor, in its methods, and in its expression; but also in its answers to the questions of today's people, and in its renewed fidelity to its content.

6. As missionaries whose charism is service to the poor, we must keep before us that fidelity which our Mission Project asks of us: "To aid in the formation of the clergy and laity and enable them to participate in the evangelization of the poor" (Cons. 1, 3\_).

This objective \_ a sign also of authenticity for the whole Church \_ must be for us the first objective for our Missions.

## OTHER POSSIBILITIES FOR THE FORMATION OF LAY MISSIONERS

Formation can be undertaken in different ways:

1. A monthly workshop on formation in the parish: The missionary team is responsible. A continual process, always open to matters that could be treated in future sessions.
2. Short intensive courses of one or two weeks.
3. Week-end gatherings for formation and conscience-raising.
4. A more complete formation course: A possibility exists for offering A **COURSE OF FORMATION FOR EVANGELIZATION**, which would include a treatment of the fundamentals of our Christian Faith:
  - Introduction to the Bible.
  - Jesus of Nazareth, the Lord.
  - Belief in God at times of disbelief.
  - The Church; community of the disciples of Jesus.
  - Christian spirituality.

The methodology of the course consists of the following steps:

1st: **PRESENTATION OF THE THEME:** Given by a team member, if possible. If not by one of the priests of the parish.

2nd: **PERSONAL STUDY OF THE THEME:** Each participant studies, reflects, and prays on the week's theme, especially the parts touching on the Word of God.

3rd: **WEEKLY GROUP MEETING:** Sharing study; reflection, and personal prayer. Meets for one hour. Five to ten members. Coordinated by a lay person or a parish priest.

4th: **CELEBRATION OF THE THEME STUDIED:** It is a good idea to have each new theme lead to a celebration, and that the Missionary lead the celebration. If he cannot, the parish priest can do it.

Who are invited to take the course? We do not overwork those who are already overworked (catechumens, those already in formation with other groups). Those

invited should be persons who want to revitalize their Faith and evangelization commitment.

Any of the foregone possibilities could serve to prepare missionaries. But there is another possibility: To promote the participation in DIOCESAN FORMATION COURSES FOR THE FORMATION OF LAY MISSIONERS by those key members of the parish who will be active in the post-Mission and different parish activities (Caritas, pastoral of the sick, liturgy committees, catechetics). In such courses they receive basic formation for their tasks within the parish.

## ROLE OF THE PRIESTS

Group coordinators meet monthly to evaluate previous meetings, prepare the following, and to animate the progress of the Mission.

They will attend all group meetings, to resolve difficulties, help to develop the current theme, and encourage the continued enthusiasm for the Mission.

When the coordinator of a group does not do a good job, the priest should take a more active voice in the proceedings to make up for the deficiencies.

As a means of realizing "co-responsibility" a CENTRAL COMMITTEE can be set up. This committee, presided over by the pastor and composed of laity, coordinates the missionary process in the parish. Different sub-commissions may function (secretary, communication, finances, formation).

## THE PRE-MISSION PREPARATION

*Amado A. Caballero III, C.M.  
Philippine Province*

The Paules' Popular Mission is a distinct and special missionary activity of the Congregation, inspired immensely by St. Vincent de Paul who was greatly affected by the very sad and pitiful conditions of the poor in his beloved people. St. Vincent made the amelioration of suffering lives his special mission. Thus, our Popular Mission has become, for us, St. Vincent's distinct and effective way of serving the Church in her work of evangelization.

In order to be true to the nature God envisioned for her the Church has to be a missionary and to effectively be able to get its work done, her sons and daughters, specifically we the religious have been called to work in her vineyards and make known and manifest God's message of love and salvation.

Here is how we of the Philippine Province conduct our Popular Missions.

The Popular Mission has three phases: 1) The Pre-Missions or Preparation, 2) Mission Proper, and 3) Post Mission or Evaluation and Follow Up.

I will share with you the Pre-Missions Preparation, which normally lasts from three to four months and involves planning, training and discussing with members to:

- a) plan for the forthcoming mission
- b) "immerse" with the people in the target areas; and
- c) select and train area/community/chapel leaders to assist in all areas of the undertaking

The Mission Team follows this procedure:

1) **Initiative of the Parish Priest.** A formal letter of invitation is sent by the Parish Priest to the Mission Team asking them to conduct a Mission in his Parish. The letter indicates the areas (to be involved, proposed time, and such other information) that would be of help to the missionaries.

2) **Immersion in the Areas.** After deliberation among the members of the Mission Teams, representatives are sent to meet with the Parish Priest to discuss the proposed Parish Mission. The Parish Priest himself facilitates and presides over this meeting. He accompanies the representatives to the areas and stays there for several days. During the immersion, they conduct social investigations (SI), ocular surveys, interviews, dialogues with the community/barangay, chapel and homeowner leaders, and home visitation. The very purpose of this is to know where the people are at. Religious, political, cultural, economic

and educational backgrounds of the people and also their concerns, and needs in the areas have to be known, addressed and utilized for future planning of the team.

The Team recognizes the importance and valuable contribution of the youth to the Mission. Before their departure, a night will be spent together by those to be involved. This activity aims to solicit support and to encourage them to take an active role during the Mission.

3) **Evaluation and Planning of the Mission Team.** After the immersion, the team goes back to their Mission base to evaluate the just concluded immersion. To have a grasp of the condition of the people, an evaluation is necessary. The possibility of the Mission is likewise discussed and a program proposal is made, where the date, personnel, follow-up programs and other details are specified. After careful and lengthy deliberations, the mission team finalizes everything and comes up with a decision, whether to push through or not. If the answer is affirmative, the director of the Mission Team or anyone of the members pays a visit to the Parish Priest or sends a written summary of the meeting.

4) **The Program Proposal is presented to the Parish Priest and the Parish Pastoral Council.** A representative is commissioned to meet the Parish Priest and the Pastoral Council to discuss and explain the proposed Mission program for clarifications and approval. If no alteration is necessary and the proposed program is approved, then a meeting of all the area leaders is called. In the meeting, the Mission Team representative explains the plan, wherein accommodation, schedule of leadership training, campaign, finances and other details are finalized. This is done on the last week of the second month or the first week of the third month of the preparation.

5) **Information Campaign begins.** Two things with regard to the information campaign. First, on the Parish level, the whole Parish should be involved. The Parish Priest and his pastoral council take the responsibility in informing the people/his parishioners about the forthcoming Mission. This could be done through announcements at all Masses, posters, streamers, banners and meetings. Second, on the area level, the leaders should be the prime movers in the neighborhood. They do house visitations, prepare posters, banners, announcements in the community bulletin boards and community meetings. All the parishioners are asked to pray and offer sacrifices for the intention of the mission.

6) **Training of Leaders.** The third month of preparation is reserved for the training of leaders. On all Sundays of the month, at their most available time, all the community leaders are required to attend the training, to be held in the Parish. They have to know that they will be working closely with the Missionaries for the whole time of the Mission. Therefore, skills training should be done prior to the Mission. They need to know certain skills, like handling small group discussions, facilitating community meetings and Bible sharings.

7) **Securing Faculties and Team Preparation.** While the Parish Priest is securing permission for the missionaries and faculty for the Priests from the Local Ordinary, the Mission Team prepares all the talks and homilies and other materials needed for the mission. The mission team director sends letters of invitation to the rector of the seminary asking for volunteers for the Mission. Likewise, he sends invitations to the Priests of the Congregation and Daughters of Charity.

8) **Orientation Seminar.** This is the immediate preparation for the Mission. A week or a few days immediately before their departure for The Mission, all the participants of the Parish Mission will undergo a three-day orientation seminar. The Mission Team leader schedules this orientation preferably in the parish where the Mission will be held. The area leaders are also invited to attend. Final directions are given and questions are answered.

Then the Mission, involving Divine assistance, begins.

# Laity on the mission team

*María Asunción Gascón Aranda*

## 1. Introduction

To begin this paper I make an initial observation. I have been a member of the Zaragoza Province Mission Team for more than 13 years. For this ministry we have our own methodology, different in many details from other methodologies. I address the subject of Laity on the Missions from this perspective.

I realize that the Laity collaborate on the Missions in different ways. For this reason, I repeat, I write of my own experiences and concerns, which could be enriched when seen from other points of view.

## 2. A little theology

As you know, according to many commentators, the missionary labors of lay persons are based on Jesus' own actions, when he sent out, *to announce the kingdom of God*, both the Twelve Apostles and a good number of disciples of every kind, as well as Laity of both sexes (Lk 8:1-3; 10:1-6).

The Apostle Paul, in Romans 16 affirms the importance of lay missionary service, particularly that of the married couple Prisca and Aquila. As a famous theologian remarks: "Their fidelity and spirit of sacrifice must have been an extraordinary help to the Pauline mission, so much so that Paul says that *all* Christian communities converted from paganism should be grateful to them" (Rom 16:4). Paul says the husband and wife, Andronica and Junia, are "outstanding among the Apostles" (Rom 16:7).

The Council, faithful to this tradition, says: "Christ, great prophet, who by the witness of his life and by virtue of his word proclaimed the kingdom of God, fulfills his prophetic mission ... not only by means of the Hierarchy, which teaches in his name and with his power, but also by means of the Laity, whom he constitutes as witnesses and enlightens with a *sense of Faith* and the grace of *the Word* (Act 2:17-18; Ap 19:10) in order that the power of the Gospel shine forth in daily family and social life" (LG, 35).

And in *Ad Gentes*: "For this reason the Laity are of greatest importance... to proclaim Christ by word and example" (AG, 15).

These texts are clear and oblige us to agree that the Laity occupy a position which surpasses the needs of the particular churches to which they belong at the present moment.

Also, did not St. Vincent want "lay" Daughters of Charity, and began lay institutes like the Ladies of Charity? And would he not favor a renewal of missions today counting in great measure on the Laity?

We Laity realize that participating in missions demands an effort to renew our mentality as well as customary practices of mission teams. But such a renewal, though not easy, is necessary and worthwhile.

### **3. Lay participation in practice**

Our Mission Team, from its beginning, has been made up of Vincentian Missioners, Daughters of Charity, and "Laity connected with the Mission." Among these lay people are marrieds, singles, men and women. So a "diversity of members and duties" of the Body of Christ, the Church, is evident. This ecclesial character of participation and co-responsibility is something which attracts and *evangelizes* in the parishes to which we are called.

In the actual carrying out of our Missions, attempting to recapture the practice of St. Vincent, who based his missions on the needs of the people, we divide the work of the mission into three stages:

1. Preparation
2. The actual Mission
3. Follow-up

In each of these three stages there is some kind of lay participation. Although our participation in the Mission itself is continuous, our presence in the other two phases, though less evident, is nonetheless of importance.

#### **3.1 Preparation for the mission**

During Preparation time, the laymen connected with the Mission have an important role as witnessing to a *committed Faith* and *co-responsibility*. Our witness is *testimony* as much for the clergy as for the laity of the parish where we are missioning. Seeing lay participation makes both clergy and laity realize that the Mission belongs to everybody.

We have different tasks during preparation, coordinating with the Mission director and with the Vincentian priests. But of special importance is just our presence in presenting the Mission to the whole parish.

#### **3.2 Participation in the actual mission**

The Mission itself consists of three parts: Meeting with the People, Proclamation of the message, formation of groups. We take part in all three in different degrees.

Basically our participation must be a witness to the role of the layman in the church. We recall the previously quoted words of the Council: "It is of greatest importance that the lay person announces Christ both by word and example" (AG 15). There are different ways of doing this:

- By "person to person evangelization" (EN 46): visits to families and group meetings, listening to problems, doing small favors, addressing problems with their priests, discovering poverty situations, finding the sick, etc. This contribution of ours can be very important.
- Attend meetings of youth, children, marriages.
- Going to family groups in their home meetings, a task we enjoy very much and understand.

- We often have been able to act as "Moderators/Animators" in meetings where Lay Missioners are formed, a task we undertake during the beginning days of the actual Mission.
- I think it important to remark here that sometimes we lay members of the team, in parishes where they are without a priest for a short period, have taken over the role of President of a Liturgical Service. Why? To show the local Laity that it is a job they also can do.

I want to note that these activities are undertaken by a C.M. from a certain perspective, by a priest in another way, by a Sister through her own charisms, and by us lay people, in our simplicity and the reality of life we share with the people, in a natural and spontaneous way. This awakens the curiosity of the people, giving rise to questions by children, youth, and adults, and opening the way for *person to person dialog* (EN 46) and a simple *witness-service* (EN 21). Their conclusion: *They are like us and are enthusiastic over the Gospel!*

It is not the same thing to bring about a reform "by decree," as by "living witness." On the mission we must not forget the Vincentian principle: *accommodation to local circumstances, time, and people* (SV I, 227). Normally this is easier for us laity.

In everything else, in our countries, so blessed with a clerical presence, it is not very easy to move towards lay participation.

### **3.3 Follow-up activities**

In our experience the problems encountered during the follow-up phase are quite varied. One task for married missioners is the forming of "Married Christian groups." Then there are the forming of other age groups, especially children and youth. Specialized tasks, but necessary, requiring specialized attention. But, I repeat, they are tasks, we laity are doing well.

In Spain, I cannot speak for other countries, material for this "simple" evangelization is scarce. Something must be prepared. And there are lay people doing it.

After a Mission the pastors have a big job. And they are lacking collaborators. They often solicit our sporadic help in getting formation and service groups started. We have collaborated often, even in Latin America.

If a Vincentian inspired catechumenate can get started, our participation can be helpful or necessary.

I think there is much to be done. We observe many communities where the people are *like sheep without a shepherd*. And often a pastor will ask us, *Now, what can I do?*

Why have I expressed this concern? Precisely because I am convinced that this job requires the collaboration of Vincentians, Daughters of Charity, and Vincentian Laity. It calls for vision, creativity, study, reflection, experimentation, joint labor... in a word, *fidelity to today's person / the experience of today's person*, and what St. Vincent keeps on telling us, *constant attention to the Spirit who blows where he wills*.

I am convinced also that Vincentian laity must strive to establish in the communities we evangelize:

- Charitable/social services.
- Some sort of solidarity with the third world.

I could recount many examples of experiences of these types that I have witnessed in missions in which I have participated.

#### **4. Growth of lay teams**

As I begin this theme I make bold to declare publicly that Vincentians need courage, humility, and work, that this theme of lay promotion, and especially of lay missionaries does not remain just talk.

Our Missions must work towards a double objective, to establish:

##### *1. Vincentian Lay Missioners*

I belong to this group. They are lay people integrated to the Mission Team, usually recruited during a Mission, either by asking to join, or being asked to join by the Mission Director or by a lay member of the team.

##### *2 Lay Vincentian Parochial Missioners*

These are parishioners who, in union with us, labor to maintain an evangelizing and missionary spirit. But it is necessary that these community groups, open to evangelization, in order to keep alive their concern for evangelization, be spiritually and materially prepared, and in continual formation. To this end they require the missionary encouragement of a Vincentian priest, and also the presence of a lay person connected to the Team.

In this double sense, the invitation by lay team members is very important. But it is also important that we lay Vincentians, aware that we need the children of St. Vincent (Vincentian priests and the D.C.'s) \_ I say "children" because we are "grandchildren" \_ so it is important for us to promote vocations to the D.C.'s and C.M.'s. And I want to tell you that we do it.

#### **5. Formation for the mission**

We laity need formation. Allow me to recall the words of our Project for Missions taken from the Constitutions of the C.M.: The members of the C.M. fulfill the end of the mission when they "help form clerics and laity and lead them to a fuller participation in the evangelization of the poor."

Lay Vincentian Missioners need, request, and deem unavoidable, an adequate formation in order to respond to the challenges of the missions. A formation embracing the following aspects:

- Ample theological-biblical formation
- Basic Vincentian formation

- Knowledge of different pastoral modalities
- Theoretical and practical knowledge of our concrete methods

To achieve these objectives we attend three Formation sessions a year, in addition to a formation period before each mission.

Furthermore we are developing a Catechumenate, Vincentian in character, because we want to feel that we are a "group," a community, and a community with a clear identity. This is necessary if we desire to develop a true Vincentian spirit.

\_ Another aspect of Lay missionary formation \_

The lay person in the communities we visit is both a receiver and an agent. In our missions there exists an important task: formation of the Laity. And towards what end?

To see their role in a New Church \_ to *evangelize*

To lead them to a *fuller participation* in the life of their community

To *change structures* so that this participation is possible.

This a primary objective of our missions. And, as I have said above, we count on the collaboration of Lay people. Sometimes this task is confided to a priest and a lay man; at other times the priest begins it and the lay person continues. Often it is done by a lay person alone, which is a good step because the laity of the parish see it is a job they themselves can do.

A conclusion from all these observations is the realization that laity need good formation to be missionaries.

## 6. Final reflection

If we desire to be efficient in our missionary apostolate, we have to be realists and listen to the Spirit with humility. There is a lot of talk about the laity in the Church. But well-oriented work with them is not easy. There is a lot of resistance to their integration in parish and missionary pastoral.

The attitude must be overcome, that, whether the laity is used or not, it is impossible to collaborate with them, or that they be utilized only because of lack of clergy.

Also super-evaluation of the laity is to be avoided. We do not want to forget that the Church is hierarchical and needs the complementarity of the priesthood of the baptized with the ministerial priesthood.

We laity need support. A few things to be avoided:

- That we be left to our own means, without the necessary support to cope with the many difficulties of a mission.
- That we do not receive a good formation.
- That we be not corrected kindly when we make mistakes. Or that we not be listened to when we observe deficiencies.

Finally, we would add impatience. Some individuals cannot wait to see the fruits of a lay missionary's labor. Actually, it has only been very recently that we have been regarded as more than "mere receivers."

I hope that you will receive these observations as not only mine, but those of many members of our Team, and that they will be of help to you. What I have written is not just theory, but experiences we have been trying to live for several years, and which hopefully can be lived in other places and by other Teams.

Thank you!

NOTE: In compiling this paper I have made use of:

1. Mission material of the Zaragoza Province, especially *A Mission Project*.
2. A conference by our Coordinator on the role of Laity on the Missions, given to the Visitors of Europe.
3. Reflections of other laity on our Mission Team.

# **The Role of the Sister in the Mission Team**

*Monique Kharouf DC*

## **Experience and Reflexion on the Mission**

In the history of the church, missionary thrust has always been a sign of vitality. Faith is strengthened when it is passed on.

Together, priest, sister and laity are sent out among our brothers and sisters in order to meet them in their search for meaning in life, in their discovering of God, in order to serve them with intelligence, and love them with passion. In a mission team each member has his/her place and role. As a Daughter of Charity I'm sharing with you my little experience as member of a mission team, pointing out the role of the sister within this mission team.

I speak of a lived experience during a mission in the summer of 1996. A two-week mission in two neighbouring villages in northern Lebanon, Bazoun and Bkerkacha. The group comprised 27 young girls and boys, 2 Vincentian priests and 6 Daughters of Charity. Our base was the village's old school. Materially poor, but rich in people's welcome and their presence.

A mission camp: witnessing to one's faith through one's life, one's joy, one's words and actions. Living a period of heightened spirituality in the communitarian climate of a team filled with gospel ideals.

Myself and two girls occupied ourselves with a group of 15- to 18-year old young people from the village. Several topics were discussed: fashions, television and its influence, (religious) sects, the sacraments of marriage and reconciliation, the difficulties which they meet in life. Time was also spent preparing the singing for mass and the vigils. An outing was organised by the group. Friendship was lived out in joy and simplicity.

## **What the sister can bring to a mission team and the mission**

My role as Daughter of Charity, servant of God and the poor, is to be present to those who need some encouragement, a helping hand or a gesture. The sister links the members of the group, the villagers and the priests. Through her meeting with and accompanying the young people, many of them ask to see the priest in order to get advice or receive the sacrament of reconciliation.

Within the group the sister is often appealed to for material or spiritual assistance: the girls especially, faced with a difficulty, approach the sister with confidence, happy to feel a welcome.

\* Following the example of Mary at Cana, her role is to follow Jesus and to lead others to him through continually paying attention to their needs.

Her feminine nature, her sensitivity, her gentleness, her prudence, her attentiveness; these all facilitate her entering into relationship with others in a simple and authentic way.

Several of the young folk, especially the members of the mission group, showed their need to speak to the sister. They wanted to mention a difficulty, ask precise questions about "choice in life, in marriage, problems with parents, in society, search for meaning in life. Various anxieties and worries were talked about and shared".

I was careful to organise my time in such a way as to be listening to these young people. This discreet presence close to them enabled me to discover the importance of these moments of sharing and meeting during the mission.

\* The presence of the sister is helpful especially for visits to the villagers. She smooths the entry of the priest and of the members of the mission group.

Visits to families created human contacts. They enabled me to discover their aspirations and their needs. In these missions the people say to us; "Stay with us. Educate our children. Make us know our religion. Everything you say to us does us good". What a longing to discover Christ better!

At the moment of parting, a certain amount of tears bear witness to the bonds which have been created and the joy of Christ present in the midst of his people all through the mission.

\* The attitude of the sister is at the same time that "of Mary and of Martha". A life of prayer which is expressed through service and practical charity. She remains attentive to the group and helps it to bring about that atmosphere which shows itself at prayer in common and through rendering humble service, getting down to practical assistance.

\* The sister's presence is a witness to the joy of a consecrated life, of a belonging to the Church, to the Company, to the poor, to a commitment to a life of giving and of service, of a "Response of love and a call of love" (C 2.6).

Her life of service poses questions for those around her.

During the mission several questions were asked about the meaning of vocation. I met young people who dared to talk of their seeking to live out a firm commitment. They also expressed their uneasiness faced with the demands of a consecrated life.

The sister's presence was for them the opportunity to share their aspirations and their anxieties as well as the christian hope which urges them, in spite of everything, to create the "civilisation of love" as Pope John-Paul II likes to repeat!

### **The problems encountered**

The difficulties encountered did not arise from my being a Daughter of Charity or from anything connected with this, but from what was felt and lived through by the mission group as such. Namely:

### Difficulty coming from the local Parish Priest

Although they had agreed to accept the mission in their village some of the priests raised obstacles when they perceived the impact of the group on their parishioners. This sometimes became seen as a power struggle: they saw themselves losing their position or their authority.

### Difficulty within the group

Sometimes certain members of the group were not sufficiently observant of their missionary commitment. They risked being the cause of disunion or indifference, and that had a bad influence on the life of the group and was regrettable for the mission. Happily this was all settled up through thoughtful reflexion in common.

### Difficulty arising from the people to whom the mission was being addressed

Some young people showed disinterest in questions concerning faith in Christ. Others kept their distance and refused the invitation to come and join us. We did however try to enter into personal contact with them, in order to encourage them to come and take part in our meetings, while however respecting their freedom of choice.

An authentic life, an attractive witnessing to a life of sharing and joy: these are very necessary for the people who surround us today and especially for those who leave the Church.

Evangelisation is not primarily a programme or a lecture; it is presence, involvement, openness to Christ.

Thank you Lord! Living those enriching days of mission amongst our most needy brothers and sisters was a grace. I have understood better that each and every person has the responsibility to spread the Kingdom in the world of today. Together let us continue the journey, full of confidence. And as Saint Vincent says: "Always do more".

Stanislaus Brindley CM, Translator

# **For the missions: a Vincentian team, comprising Priests of the Mission, Daughters of Charity and Laity**

*João Maria Barbosa Lemos, CM*

## **1 Definition of the subject**

Instead of long and profound considerations about the renewed Vincentian Popular Mission, we will try instead to share with you our experience in Portugal concerning a Vincentian missionary team composed of Vincentian priests, Daughters of Charity and Laity.

Having heard mention of "the laity's role in mission," we shall focus our modest contribution on "working together \_ the play of relationships within the team." Because of that and not to follow the temptation to get away from the subject, we shall try as much as possible to remain faithful to the schema presented by Fr. Luis María Martínez San Juan who was a member of the preparatory commission for the Vincentian Month.

### **2.1 Who are we?**

The team is comprised of: Fr João Maria Barbosa Lemos; Sister Maria do Carmo DC, a nurse; and two lay people, Maria Irène from Lousado-Porto, Maria Otilie from Faro-Algarve.

### **2.2 Reflection on our motivation**

Here in resume is what led us, in one way or another, into the experience of mixed missionary teams:

**2.2.1** "Finally, members should teach clerics and laity to work together and to support one another in the process of forming a Christian community" (CM Constitutions 15,3).

**2.2.2** "In apostolic initiatives, provinces and individual houses should willingly work in fraternal cooperation with each other, with the diocesan clergy, with religious institutes and with the laity" (CM Statutes 3).

**2.2.3** The Daughters of charity of the Province of Portugal felt themselves called by the spirit of collaboration, of participation in missionary activity in common. They took the first steps in this work in common with very good results..

**2.2.4** The Laity opened themselves up more to the evangelising mission of the Church, aware that such and involvement is part of their baptismal vocation, since through baptism we are all missionary.

**2.2.5** All this led the Priests, Sisters and Laity to involve themselves in a common evangelical activity which gives greater Church witness.

### **2.3 Lay participation in the missionary team**

A good while ago in Portugal the Daughters of Charity began taking part in the popular missions along with the Priests of the Mission.

In 1988 there began, with good results, the experience of lay involvement. Today the team for the Renewed Vincentian Popular Mission generally comprises a Vincentian priest, a Daughter of Charity, and a lay man or woman. When for one reason or another no sister is available two lay women can team up with the priest. Likewise when no lay person is available two sisters can team up with the priest. But normally and ideally the team consists of a priest, a sister, a man or a woman. Thus composed the team is more ecclesial and has greater sign value: it gives better witness, it shows more clearly that the Church is missionary. In short it has a deeper impact regarding the specific dynamic of the mission. It shows in a fuller and better way that missionary activity is done by all, with all and aiming at all.

There have been numerous popular missions given as a team. They have generally been asked for by bishops and/or by the parish priests. They regard this activity as a high point in evangelisation.

### **2.4 Missionary activity carried out as a team**

This is a very rich and positive experience. Why?

- In it one receives more than one gives: "It is in giving that one receives."
- It is a sharing of prayer, of lived faith, and of work in common.
- It gives a better chance to respond to the various challenges and appeals which arise from the reality of missioning.
- The varied composition of the team makes it easier to contact the people being evangelised, however complex the reality may be.
- It brings back to life the words of the gospel: "The Lord sent them out two by two."

The results from the team mission are in general very positive and most interesting. That does not mean that problems do not arise or difficulties inherent in life as a group or as a team. The contrary would be surprising. But in Jesus Christ, Evangeliser of the poor, it is possible to surmount difficulties, overcome eventual barriers and bring about union. In this perspective possible frictions and conflicts are easily resolved.

### **2.4 Attitudes to be cultivated during a mission**

In order to avoid acting merely on the surface

- We are not content with a mere "external polishing up." It is necessary to revitalise the faith of people, so that their faith might throw light on their problems.
- We do not simply seek to resolve immediate practical problems, but rather an authentic conversion to the gospel.
- We wish to see the conversion of the agents of mission (laity, priests, missionaries).

## **2.5 Rules of life during mission**

*We are not:*

- a) The "good," the saviours, the ones who know.
- b) "Salespersons" who seek at any price to sell their merchandise.
- c) "Curious journalists" who are searching for news.
- d) Our aim is not the preaching of sermons, for we wish to avoid constraint and intolerance.
- e) We do not wish to bring about in the people visited an allergy for the faith, the parish, the mission.

*We are:*

- a) Like Jesus, "friends who draw near in order to serve and not for some other reason, asking nothing in return.
- b) Like Jesus, we go out to meet people, to make them an offer, not to impose on them. It is only our life that can convince.
- c) Like Jesus, we are messengers of a Good News: "Peace to this house."
- d) Like the first disciples of Jesus, we are Christians who are missionary, convinced and joyous.
- e) We believe in a God who is good and who is a Father; we believe that the human heart is fundamentally good.
- f) In short, we seek to adopt an evangelical style of simplicity, humility, amiability, prudence.

## **3.1 The spirit of the team at the three stages of the mission**

### **3.2 Preparation time: pre-mission**

The missionary team, once constituted, seeks to:

- Cultivate team spirit even at a distance.
- Pray for the mission about to be given.
- To know the reality which has to be missioned, at least through research made by the parish priest and/or the local parish team.
- To make contact with the reality to be missioned, if not by all the members of the team at least by the coordinator or the members nearest to the locality.
- As much as possible, it is the team which announces and prepares the mission at its different stages.

### **3.3 During the core of the mission itself**

We try to:

- Live in a team spirit, each one accepting his or her situation and bringing out the best of his or her particular giftedness: "One for all and all for one."
- Pray as a team or with other teams if there are several.

- Plan and evaluate the work of each day.
- Take meals as a team, in general and preferably with families.’

### **3.4 Activities during the core of the mission**

*First Stage: Meeting.* The missionary, coming from outside, makes contact with all. He visits the families for a friendly chat. The preparation continues with the formation of animators.

*Second Stage: The Word.* We announce the Message, the Good News, in a very simple way, taking account of age and other differences.

*Third Stage: Group Meetings.* Neighbours and friends meet in houses. Normally it is one person of the group who animates the dialogue in his own house. Christ makes himself present. We do not forget to get the sick to participate in so far as it is possible.

*Final Stage: Assembly of the People of God.* All feel responsible and united in the aim of reviving the awareness of being the People of God on the march.

NB Normally the exchanges last two or three weeks.

### **3.5 Post-Mission; present situation**

This lasts one year.

We try to direct attention to the church as being missionary, preoccupied with the poor and social justice.

About half-way through there is a meeting with animators. This deals principally with the theme of "Christian pedagogy" or something else if judged more appropriate.

At the end of the year there takes place a meeting of two or three days in the mission location with all the team if possible.

### **4.1 Importance of the theme for the renewed mission**

#### **4.2 Ecclesial**

The team witnesses to the varied charisms within the Church: priest, religious, laity. It witnesses to a greater willingness for sharing, communion, unity. It constitutes a challenge: Priests, Sisters, Laity: all of us are called to the evangelising mission of the Church.

#### **4.3 Pastoral**

It is easier to reach the different levels of the people to be missionized, whoever they may be.

We seek to reach everyone by means of:

- person to person encounters
- small group encounters
- proclamation through preaching and dialogue
- celebrations, prayers, sacramental liturgies
- visits to the poor and needy.

#### **4.4 Vincentian**

It is through this joyous proclamation of Jesus Christ, the unique Saviour, sent by the Father who gave us the Holy Spirit.

#### **4.5 Possible orientations for the Vincentian missions**

- It is a rich experience to be developed and to be made bear fruit.
- Care must be taken to give a particularised preparation to the different participants so that each one can assume his particular role.
- Care must also be taken with regard to learning the dynamics of team spirit so that the mission becomes more and more a witness-sign: "see how they love one another." "They have one heart and one soul".

#### **4.6 How does this approach respond to the problems of the indifferent?**

The feed-back and the preliminary survey give an idea of the concrete reality, including the indifferent, which will never be lost sight of. We continue to be sensitive to the real situation:

- by witnessing to our insertion, our active solidarity, our joy in remaining close to people;
- by interceding through our life of prayer which speaks for itself;
- by remaining in contact with all sorts of less favoured people: sick, aged, poor, drug-affected
- by generally taking our meals with families: that de-freezes, breaks down barriers and prejudices, resolves conflicts;
- by giving personal testimony of joy, simplicity and solidarity with all;
- by going out to meet people whatever be their concrete situation, race or colour.
- by urging the practising to invite those estranged from the Church to "try out" the mission.

#### **5.1 How is the theme understood?**

*Missionaries.* There are missionaries who no longer understand any other way of giving missions apart from in a mixed team. Others prefer to remain faithful to their individualism. In other words: some see team-work, participation and collaboration as an enrichment. Others perhaps see it as an obstacle since they prefer to continue to work alone.

*Priests and laity whom we are directing.* They have in general a very positive idea of us. They see in us a sign of the Church, an ecclesial group which gives better witness, a synthesis of charisms in the service of evangelisation. Some find themselves challenged: "Will this woman come because she does not know what to do? Well then why does she come?"

*The Poor.* They perceive very well the significance of our presence and the words of the Gospel: "whoever welcomes you, welcomes me;" "whoever receives you, receives me." From that, there springs their gestures of sharing, of friendship, of gratitude, in spite of their poverty.

*Dioceses and those bearing pastoral responsibility.* We are certainly understood and accepted by the bishops and the pastors who request our missions. There are parish priests who ask for us after simply informing their bishop.

## **6.1 Possible conclusions to draw**

## **6.2 For a new evangelisation in the 21st century**

Working as a missionary team will facilitate the new evangelisation not only of individual persons but of entire groups of people in their diverse situations and cultures. They will be led to form adult ecclesial communities which will grow in the faith and realise the full original meaning of adhering to the person of Christ and his gospel.

It will be easier to bring the gospel to non-believers and to the indifferent by leading them into a way of initiation and encounter in the certainty that God loves each one of them and that Jesus Christ is Saviour of all.

There will be formed a lively and active laity ready to participate and become missionary.

There will take place an education in justice and solidarity, taking in the conditions of poverty and inequality, by trying to respond to these through actions of individuals and groups.

## **6.3 For keeping our style of mission up to date**

- Remaining attentive to the realities of society.
- Forming a laity which is aware and committed to mission.
- Making the "Vincentian Mission" more dynamic: new ardour, new methods, new experiences.

## **7.1 Conclusion:**

We are trying to share with you a little of what is lived out in the Renewed Vincentian Popular Mission according to the perspective expected of us: "working together, and the relationships within the team." We have not tried to exhaust the subject. Perhaps that does not correspond to what you were expecting. Certainly there remain many questions to ask and responses to seek. That is what we can do now, after barely beginning to communicate and share our experiences. Forgive me if I have not corresponded with your expectations.

Translator: Stanislaus Brindley CM

# The integration of the family in the mission

*P. Antonio Ruiz, C.M.*

The following document is an actual example of doing Parish Mission involving the whole family from the pre-mission stage to the actual preaching of the Parish Mission. I offer here two models, one to be used in the Parish Church and the other in the homes of the parishioners. The first one contains a more elaborated pre-mission than the second, though the announcements in the parish bulletins, the focus on praying for its ongoing success in the prayers of the faithful and other means of spreading the news of the mission is the same. In each one the content is different and the method also.

## Model one

The Parish Mission begins with its announcement many weeks before. It is planned by the Parish Staff after being recommended by the Parish Council and approved by the Pastor. The family \_ children, teenagers and parents \_ distribute the pamphlets previously prepared by the youth ministry, to neighbors, people living in the same street, block or apartment complex; outside the subway entrance, outside the supermarkets, etc. Signs can be posted in store windows, in the barbershop, beauty salon malls and other places where people meet. If the PM is taking place in a rural area with migrant workers, then pamphlets are sent to the people in the fields where they work making them aware of the coming parish event. If it is possible, the pre-mission team announces the PM on the radio several times. When the Missionary comes he can go to the station and do it personally.

All this time the parish family as a whole is planning, thinking, talking and praying for the coming PM. The Legion of Mary, the Prayer Groups, the Rosary chain, etc. are all reaching out to the heavens to anoint the Missionary and to fill the Church with the lost sheep, the unchurched, the lukewarm, and the one in need of growth and salvation.

*The ACTUAL MISSION begins with songs and praise.* Congregational singing is necessary to engage the people and ignite them to be alive, attentive and focused on the missionary effort. The priest enters in procession accompanied by the lector, the parent presenter, the youth and people giving testimonies and the children carrying banners or visual aids to be used during the presentation. The family unit is present from the onset at the PM and stays there participating actively in its different roles pre-assigned by the organizing team. After an Introductory prayer by the Presider, the lector proclaims the Word of God then the missionary introduces the subject \_ a family issue \_ makes a few points and then he sits down. One or both parents come and address the subject, for example domestic violence. They explain how it can be physical, emotional sexual, verbal, etc. and give instances of them. Then they sit down. A young man, a young lady or both get up and give a witness of how that behavior has affected their lives and how they felt then and now. They point out the scars, it has left on their personalities, fears, insomnia, lack of self-esteem, rejection, anger, etc. They show how this dysfunctional home has an effect in the ordinary growth of their relationships and how easy it is to hide for protection, security and strength into a gang. Children stand up during all this time with visual aids in their hands showing them to the congregation, as the talk unravels. Children may also be included to tell their stories in each case, that adds reality, dramatization, conviction, and touches the people's psyche.

In other cases, the teenagers offer a dramatization or do a live short sketch or present a home movie on domestic violence, the effects of drugs, alcohol or free sex. The children may help in the presentation, using banners, pantomime, dance, showing signs at the same time as the speaker is talking.

The congregation have been made aware of the problem and now it is up to the missionary to tell the people what are we going to do about it. He may explain the process of self-deception about getting help, not now, tomorrow; or I don't have a problem, I can change by myself alone any time I want, I don't need help from anybody. Then he brings God into the picture showing how by surrendering to a higher power we can change our lives. We need the support and the encouragement of others and that is why it is so important to connect them with any of the parish groups, bible class, prayer groups, services, visit to the sick, doing volunteer work in the parish or community, joining any of the Vincentian Family ministries.

*The session ends with a joyful song sung by the whole assembly.* If the people are multi-cultural or bilingual we sing this or a similar song, We are the Body of Christ.

Other subjects of great interest are family addictions to television, money, the mall, going shopping daily, crazy for sales or just merely going window shopping out of boredom, alcoholism, drugs, teenage violence, gangs, etc.

I like to involve the whole family in the preparation of the prayers, choosing the songs, playing and singing. Congregational singing is the best to make it inclusive. Have them praise God with their hands and body motions. Have a leader of music in front of the people singing, raising his hands, clapping, and showing the movements he wants the congregation to follow. The children can be great animators. Make sure they enjoy what they are doing.

## **Model two**

This model takes place in the homes of the parishioners. You start with a team of two or three people. They are already converted and enthusiastic about sharing their faith with others. The head of the household invites his Catholic neighbors to his home and the priest convenes those assembled with the Mass. Those invited may be family members of friends also. The team explains that by reason of their baptism they are called to bring the Good News to others. The following weeks, instead of the Mass the session starts with praise, songs or the rosary. Then they use "Catecismo Ilustrado" Enseñanzas Católicas Esenciales, Catholic Book Publishing Co. N.Y. This is a question and answer catechism, easy to follow. It is simple, clear, short and manageable. A member of the team asks the question to the adults present and they also ask him questions. The purpose of this process is to learn the adequate answers related to fundamental truths of our salvation, in a way that is systematic, not improvised, and progressive. It follows the instruction of John Paul II in "Catechesi Tradendae, 21": "The Christian Catechesis must deal with essentials, without any claim to tackle all disputed questions or to transform itself into theological research or scientific exegesis; it must nevertheless be sufficiently complete, not stopping short at the initial proclamation of the Christian mystery such as we have in the kerygma; it must be an integral Christian initiation, open to all the other factors of Christian Life." They also use "Manual para el Católico de Hoy," with "Referencias al Catecismo de la Iglesia Católica," Liguori Publications. The teenagers and the older children can be present during the session. If they are rowdy and do not follow the process they can be taken to another room, and a team

member teaches them bible stories and other things suitable to their capacity. The same method question and answer may be followed here also.

It is very important to finish with a prayer where the needs of the people are clearly expressed and raised to God. It is easy for the people to pray in this fashion because everyone has concrete needs for themselves and for others, related to their health, pain, sorrows, family problems, work, the children's school, future aspirations, etc. The team makes sure that everyone has a chance to say something, either in the form of prayer of petition or thanksgiving. There is no rush. They finish with a song and the kiss of peace.

In this process of evangelizing, the un-churched begin to ask the team, how can I baptize my child? I would like to have my marriage blessed in the Church; how can Lupita make her First Communion? I have a pregnant girl, we have no money to carry the baby, pay for the hospital and care for the child. The mother is too young. How can the Church help us? These and other questions are answered by the lay missionaries who refer them to various Parish, Diocesan and Community Resources.

In this model of doing PM the team becomes a link between the Parish and the people, bringing them not only the Gospel of Jesus, but informing them of the many services available to them. Working in this fashion, they show that the Church cares for their whole person not just their souls, they build community and establish bonds of friendship. You can have an ongoing evangelization going on in your parish being done by these parish cells. After the mission is finished in this home, one of the members of the household teams up with an existing member and the process continues in another home, being first introduced by the presence of the Priest and the Mass.

To form the team, two or three people willing and able to do it, they need to have an initial conversion and a period of formation. This is done by sending people to make the Cursillo, the Life in the Spirit Seminar, the Marriage Encounter, or any type of retreat where the people find themselves face to face with God and their final destiny, and are energized to go out into the world and change it.

In a time where there is a shortage of Missionary priests, this model can be very well utilized to have the laity do their part in the evangelization process in a way that is non-threatening, practical, uses the peoples' resources, time and talents. These lay missionaries, once you make them feel important, they become enthusiastic, loyal, and willing to do it.

Looking up to the 21st century this last model becomes a powerful tool in the hands of the laity under the umbrella of the Pastor or the Associate Pastor.

# Mission for the young couples

*P. Bartolomeo Monge, C.M.*

## Introduction

"The traditional missions, often abandoned too hastily, are indispensable if we are to obtain a periodic and vigorous renewal of Christian life" (John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation "Catechesi Tradendae", n.47).

"The catechetical action of the family has a special character and is, under a certain aspect, unreplaceable.... The parents will strive to follow and to reproduce, in the family context, the more methodical formation received elsewhere" (John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation "Catechesi Tradendae", n.68).

"The gift of the Spirit is a vital command for the Christian couples, and at the same time a stimulating impulse helping them in their daily progress towards a mutual union always richer at all levels \_ at body, character, heart, intelligence and soul levels \_, a progress disclosing to the Church and to the whole world the new communion in love, given by the grace of Christ in the Sacrament of Marriage" (John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation "Familiaris Consortio", n.19).

Following these indications of the Magisterium, in the course of the Vincentian Popular Mission, we are trying to dedicate special encounters to the family, during which will develop and grow towards its full maturation not only their human life, but also a concrete life of faith.

Reflection on the theme

## 1) Description of the experience

In the course of the Popular Mission we propose that a few evenings be devoted to a series of encounters with a reflection on themes involving the life of the couple and the education of their children. Usually we propose three or four evenings, in which we study the life of the couple and its problems, responsible fatherhood and motherhood, the means of having the faith of the couple grow steadily, which is the basis for a life of faith in family. To these encounters are especially invited the young couples, who in the situation of the Christian communities in Italy, are those undergoing the greatest difficulty to practice their faith within the community itself and are also those which have generally to support the burden of the education of children during the first years of their growing.

The "Direttorio di Pastorale Familiare" published by the Italian Episcopal Conference suggests three points for emphasis:

- a) looking for these young couples,
- b) accepting as a value their presence in the community,
- c) accompanying all the young couples, in order to help them live their vocation and mission, overcoming the first "crises" which can spring up.

The Vincentian Popular Mission, follows this process:

- a) during the Pre-Mission (a time when the Pastor and his Council should be looking for the young couples),
- b) during the Mission itself (receiving the couples in the encounters specially programmed for them),
- c) during the Post-Mission (proposing the formation of a group which will study family spirituality in order to follow the new paths opened by the Mission).

## **2) Results obtained and problems met**

Once these encounters have been programmed and the Pastor with his Council have succeeded in the task of looking for and inviting the couples to the encounters, those who have accepted to come have always manifested a great interest in the themes studied; one can say that there is really a sincere research of light in the Word of God and in the Magisterium of the Church, in order to be able to live in joy and peace the first years of their experience of a Christian family.

The biggest difficulties met, as far as this method of encounters for the couples is concerned, is the tendency many among them have to live in a certain seclusion from others; the problem of how "to find time" in order to share in these encounters: sometimes an "insufficient knowledge" of their presence, as far as the Christian community itself is concerned.

The Popular Mission is often the opportunity to "discover" these couples and to begin a new way of meeting them.

## **3) Lessons for the future**

As Vincentian missionaries we can

- a) be a stimulus to the Christian communities, helping them to stay attentive to the evangelisation of the young families,
- b) provoking, during the time of the Mission itself, a "joyful experience" of encounters for the young couples themselves, an experience which will go on after the Mission as a "group of family spirituality".

## **4) How this can respond to the problem of those "far from the church"**

The young couples are coming from various experiences of faith, and sometimes from periods of having been far from the faith. The proposal of a way of reflection is a precious opportunity to "re-discover" values which have become drowsy but can regain enthusiasm and vigour. The "Group of Family Spirituality" which could prolong the experience lived during the Mission will be a support to this re-discovering and a help for continuity.

## **5) A contribution to the actualization of the vincentian mission**

Working in the field of young couples stimulates a continuous newness of announcing the Gospel, since it compels the missionary to be nearer to the concrete situations of life; this

leads to a continuous renewal in the various fields of human sciences and in a deepening of the spirituality specific to the Christian Marriage.

A large space can be opened with the effective cooperation of young couples who, during the Popular Mission, join in the animation of these specific encounters for young couples.

It is a new way of doing things, which actualizes the attention brought by Saint Vincent, in his days, to all the categories of persons to whom he was bringing the announcement of the Gospel.

It is a way of being concerned by one of the "new poverties" of our times, in the fields of spiritual life, and of life of faith.

# ROUND TABLE ON THE VARIOUS LISTENERS

## LISTENERS GROUPS

*Bruno Cogoni C.M.*

1) My first experience on "Listeners Groups" was in 1970 when, in the aftermath of Vatican II, the members of the Sassari (Sardinia, Italy) missionary "team" began asking themselves: "What could we do to offer to our people the possibility of expressing their difficulties?" Actually, the faithful coming to church were able to listen to our homilies, but were not offered the possibility to intervene. Usually, "dialogue" in church was practically reduced to a monologue between missionary (teacher) and missionary (disciple).

Why then not choose to have meetings in the Christian houses? So we did. We set about organizing family encounters, dividing the parish in sectors according to the extension of the territory and the number of the inhabitants, and in each sector, the evening, after dinner (at 8:30 p.m.), the missionary went to the family where the meeting was supposed to be held and the other families living in the sector were invited to join in.

Immediately the faithful appreciated this familiar style of catechizing, because they were offered the opportunity to intervene and to express their own experience and their difficulties on the matter which was proposed by the missionary for discussion. From this day on we never abandoned this method of spreading the Word and of catechizing.

In the 70s, we used to dedicate five days of the first week of the mission (usually the mission goes on during 15 days) to these "Listeners Groups" and four days of the second week to the community meetings in church. But from the year 80 on, we used also three days of the second week for the "Listeners Groups": because we had become aware that, to the community meetings in church, were coming only the customary fold, whereas in the "Listeners Groups" we had many more people.

In 1981, when the First National Meeting on the Missions to the People was held in Rome, where we tried to evaluate our 1980 Mission work, it became obvious that all the Religious Communities devoting their members to the popular missions were tending to adopt this new style of evangelization. They were encouraged by Pope John Paul II, who told the delegates: "Before, the Christian People were coming to you in order to listen to you; the time has come when YOU must go to the people!"

The meetings in private houses or "Listeners Groups" (this appellation was used after the 1981 Assembly) form the most interesting aspect of the new methodology; the meetings are held in a climate of familiarity and reciprocal esteem between the missionary and the participators. Very often the conversation becomes personalized to the extent of allowing an exchange of more intimate, human and religious, experiences.

In Sardinia, for the "Listeners Groups", we direct the parish team in charge of preparing the Mission to seek those families which are ready to receive at home the other

families of the sector. We provide the Organizing Group with a few practical criteria which will help them in choosing the families which will host the "Listeners Groups":

- a. favouring the families neglected as far as religious practice is concerned;
- b. being attentive that the family which will host the Group not be in disagreement with the other families in the parish;
- c. taking care that the room where the meeting is about to take place be large enough to accommodate every one;
- d. making sure that the host family accept to invite personally the families living in the sector;
- e. suggesting to avoid that sweets be offered during the meeting; this would only disturb the participators.

It is recommended to change the hosting family every evening in order to increase the interest of other families and to avoid the danger of limiting the participation to a few accustomed people. Moreover one should propose every evening to all the families of the sector who have already taken part in the former meetings to go on coming and sharing in the successive encounters. This is the way, during the mission, to be able to give a true and proper catechesis.

On the last days of the Mission one should organize also a Community Meeting, to which are invited all those who took part in the "Listeners Groups" in order to verify the success and encourage people to go on meeting after the Mission has ended.

Other religious communities dedicated to the popular missions prefer to adopt the system of having the persons to participate in one "Listeners Group" only, without a special theme being chosen; the themes are proposed freely by the participants. But in doing so they are not offered the possibility of taking part in various encounters and there is a risk of missing the opportunity of a deeper catechesis, which the Mission should offer.

2) What are the results obtained in these "Listeners Groups"?

- a. Preaching of the Good News becomes more familiar.
- b. Persons are offered the possibility of intervening to express their experiences and difficulties.
- c. It fosters communication between the families.
- d. It helps create in the parish \_ if it does not exist yet \_ a mentality in favor of continuing, even after the Mission, the "Listeners Groups" encounters, and of fostering adult catechesis.

3) What kind of problems have been met?

- a. Some apathy and individualism among the people.

- b. Diffidence, especially among men, while taking part in the encounters. The majority of participants are women.
- c. The religious ignorance of many people.
- d. The need to deepen one's knowledge of the Christian message.

4) During the Mission, the Listeners Groups bring together the neighbours and some people living a little farther (not many). The missionaries insist on a greater responsibility among neighbors, so that the parochial community may become more attentive, more sensible and hospitable for the people living farther.

5) There is no doubt that the institution of "Listeners Groups" offers to a parochial community the possibility of initiating a New Evangelization.

Presently in the parishes there is no longer a catechesis directed to adults. The "Listeners Groups" represent a form which can help revive this dimension. One of the objectives of the Popular Mission is that of creating a will to meet others, even after the Mission, in order to foster a continuity in deepening one's knowledge of the truths of faith.

The "Listeners Groups" are certainly one of the new forms the Vincentian Mission should adopt in order to help our people overcome this kind of religious ignorance, which St. Vincent discovered in the countryside at his time and which today is to be found especially in our towns. At the time of St. Vincent, the ignorance was due to the abandoning of poor people to their fate; today the situation is more complex, because of widely spread materialism, individualism and apathy.

# **The popular mission in the context of a young church: Madagascar**

*by Vincent de Paul TSANGANDAHY cm*

To speak of a Popular Mission with regard to what is referred to as a Mission country@ seems a bit strange to us. The term Popular mission@ came into use in a context where christianity was already considered as a tradition.

In the case of Madagascar the Vincentian missionaries began this work only 50 years after they settled in the country. What is its aim? and how does the Province of Madagascar envisage this work with a view to the future?

Such is the purpose of this talk.

## **The aims of the popular mission in the context of Madagascar**

The popular mission was undertaken in Madagascar with a two-fold aim:

On the one hand, conscious of their role as first evangelisers of the south of Madagascar, the Vincentians had always considered it important to adopt the Vincentian method of itinerant mission in order to found christian communities.

On the other hand, the Madagascar missionaries are convinced that the popular mission is an their pastoral activities in terms of the different levels of involvement of each christian. Faced with this second objective, the missionaries find that the popular mission can take the form of a permanent mission exercised by a permanent team in a fixed place.

We thus distinguish two forms of popular mission in operation in Madagascar: the itinerant mission and the permanent mission.

## **The itinerant mission in Madagascar**

In the context of Madagascar the missionaries have always styled their manner of evangelising according to the image of the itinerant mission as it was processed by St Vincent de Paul and his original group.

This mission consisted in visiting the villages in the different places in the south of Madagascar. Naquart and his group discovered that the itinerant mission was the method best suited to evangelisation in the case of malgache society.

The social structure of Madagascar makes one readily think of popular mission as a method of evangelising . The villages are grouped together and it is easy to organise a meeting or a visit according to the original form of itinerant mission as St Vincent had conceived it.

## **The permanent mission : second form of popular mission in Madagascar**

Parallel the itinerant mission, the permanent mission consists of presenting the popular mission as a long-term undertaking for a permanent team in a fixed place or area.

This form of mission enables us, on the one hand, to found ecclesial communities, and on the other hand to animate the overall pastoral project of the diocese in a framework of close collaboration with laity and with other institutions having the same aims in evangelisation as our province.

In the case of Madagascar these two forms of mission constitute the fundamental work of the popular mission.

### ***What connexion is there between Popular Mission and Mission ad Gentes in the Madagascar context?***

Madagascar is in fact a mission country. So it is appropriate to speak of mission ad Gentes with regard to the popular mission. It is obvious that the mission ad Gentes is characterised traditionally by missionary presence among unbelievers in the face of the popular mission which is in principle defined as the Christian tradition present in the country. (1)

It must be recognised that this definition was true at the time of the foundation of the Congregation of *propaganda fide* by Pope Gregory XV in 1622. We know for example that at that time Africa was considered as the object of evangelisation. At present, especially since Vatican II, we recognise that all these mission countries are becoming in their turn evangelising subjects.

Anyway if we refer to St Vincent de Paul's conception we observe that what counted for him was not a question of knowing the juridical form or the theological aspect of the mission. For him the only concern was to announce the good news to the poor. (2)

In fact, the aim of the mission is summed up for St Vincent in these three following points: union, Providence and availability.

**Union:** For St Vincent the first principle which animates his preaching is Union. In the missions which he preaches his objective is to unite a person with God through conversion (confessions); union or reconciliation of people between themselves and union within families in conflict. In short his always witnessing to the joy of living with God and among brothers. This principle of union is connected with the notion of the Trinity, a unity in the love of God, a devotion which is very strong with St Vincent.

**Providence:** Providence is then for St Vincent obedience to the will of God. Is mission

interior (to the country) or exterior? That is not his first question. What counts above all for him is accomplishing the will of God, whether that be in Madagascar or elsewhere.

**Availability:** Readiness to accomplish the will of God is so strong with St Vincent that he instituted his company on the basis of *availability*. Hence the sense of itinerant mission. To be an itinerant missionary means for St Vincent a way of putting oneself at the service of God and in detachment it is a way of giving oneself totally to God with the sole aim of evangelising the poor.

Coming back to Madagascar, we consider that the popular mission and the mission ad Gentes are two inseparable poles of evangelisation. The two are not contradictory but rather complement each other. The missionary's work is like that of the farmer: he has to return several times to his field after he has cleared it, in the hope of eventually gathering some crops. It is thus that we present the popular mission as a means of bringing about internally the mission ad Gentes.

This situation presents itself as a great challenge to the indigenous missionaries who are evangelising within their own country.

This challenge comes about through the fact that they have not only to pay attention to the social realities according to the recommendations of our Constitutions (C 12,2), but especially have they to meet the challenge of bringing it about that, on the one hand, the content of their preaching meets the present-day needs of the church in Madagascar, and on the other, in the specific context of their own culture, they are able to proclaim their faith in this *Unidiverse* God, that is to say the Unique One in his diversity and the Diverse One in his unity(3).

That is why the province of Madagascar wishes to undertake mission work by adapting to the present-day situations and circumstances of the country, by examining all the possibilities of displaying a new thrust, either to reanimate and constitute a thoroughly christian community, or to awaken faith in the soul of the non-christians@(C 14)

What are the methods adopted for providing a popular mission in Madagascar.

As regards the parish mission our method doesn't differ in general from what is used according to Vincentian tradition in our various provinces. It is a question of organizing the three phases of the popular mission:

- a) preparation time for the mission, which in principle lasts between six months and a year; always trying to be in harmony with the special liturgical times.
- b) carrying out, or the heart of the mission; preaching and celebration of the faith, which generally lasts two weeks.
- c) life after the mission which always remains the long-term fruit of the popular mission.

To know more in detail about this method, I invite you to refer to an article which I presented in *Vincentiana* of January -February 1995 p 34-37, about an experience I had particularly because I was Parish Priest of a parish which was preparing to welcome a popular mission.

However it is useful to point out that our present-day task, in so far as we are organizers of the popular mission in our Province, is to deepen the method(s) so that they be more adapted to the social reality of Madagascar. This requires on our part a theological competence to make our popular mission into an effective contribution to the pastoral programme of the diocese in which we are working. It is in fact the reason for our participation in this Vincentian month.

With regard to what we called the *Apermanent mission@*, our method represents a whole programme of evangelization. As our target accords with the christian communities and the *Anew communities@*, we have three phases:

a) the study of the milieu which consists in making a reconnaissance of the territory in order to note what are the lived realities in the particular society (social, cultural, economic...), this is also considered like the first contact of the missionaries with the population;

b) the settling in of the team;

c) the mission as such, which can have a duration of six months or five years according to the contract with the diocese concerned.

It is in this perspective that we are working hard to establish an ecclesial link which is based principally on the social link existing in our country.

We recognize that to speak of these two methods our experience is still at a very early stage in Madagascar. We are hoping that this Vincentian month may inspire us with ideas to improve what we have already realized.

### *Conclusion:*

To conclude this presentation I should admit in all simplicity that in the context of Madagascar the popular mission is only beginning to have its true appearance. These few years of experience enable us to understand that a popular mission is a *Amoment of grace@* for a whole community.

We are convinced that our principal trump card is the art of working as a team in mutual respect for the worth of each preacher and in praying. Each christian community which has gone through this experience with us always tells us that the popular mission is above all an occasion for giving each family a taste for prayer, the joy of having celebrated the faith; the joy of re-establishing peace within itself and with God; the joy of conversion.

We are convinced that the popular mission is at the heart of Vincentian missionary work in Madagascar. It is the seed of other Vincentian works. It gives us the art of expressing to the simple the mysteries of the faith, and the art of knowing how to pass on the love of God to the neighbour.

We can affirm that in thus acting we are in line with the aims of evangelisation in Africa which is to support the African family by evangelising it, so that, in its own turn, it should become the first place for evangelisation. It is thus that each member of the Church-Family gives better witness to Jesus Christ, the Way the truth and the Life (Ecclesia in Africa, Chap IV).

We wish to constitute a permanent team, ready to do nothing but popular missions for the next few years. And we would be happy to see laity and Daughters of Charity collaborating with us in this work so dear to our founder.

Stanislaus Brindley, translator

#### NOTE

- 1 L. Mezzadri & Nuovo, *St. Vincent de Paul par lui même*, Roma 1981 p. 82.
- 2 Coste, P. XI, 423.
- 3 François de Salis, *Traité de l'Amour de Dieu* III, 2.

# Youth mission

David Fernandez Nuñez, C.M.

## Introduction

Ministry to Youth in Spain faces two very important challenges: first, evangelical inculturation and second, just as important, a lack of pastoral workers attuned to the world of the young.

Deep sociological changes, weakening much of the traditional pastoral involvement of youth, move through the world of the young Spaniard. Some pastoral workers lack any real enthusiasm as they face the increasing difficulty of building bridges to communicate between two worlds that seem irreconcilable: the Christian message of faith that wants to develop the involvement of young people and the reality of their world today.

We need to ask ourselves: Are young people a single, tight sociological group? Does a youth culture exist that is completely separate and different from the world of adults?

Orizo<sup>1</sup> says that age is an important and formative element shaping attitudes and values. Sociological data shows us that people become more conservative and traditional in their attitudes as they age. And attitudes that are more revolutionary, open, radical or secular are decisively those of the young.

Citing Andres Orizo himself; *"Thus, youth groups prefer values like health, adaptability to change, consideration for friends and free time, materialistic values, care of the environment, scientific advances and technology, permissiveness, potential for political action (illegal strikes and the occupation of buildings and factories), European identity. The family, religion, politics, authority, the pride of being Spanish and the struggle for country are less important values"*.

## Two youth subcultures

The sociological data indicates (according to Orizo) that all young people don't follow one pattern in a series of significant values. The constellations of values are not the same for the 18 - 24 year old group as for those 25 - 34. The 18 - 24 year olds declare themselves more satisfied with life as it is, and don't seem to share attitudes and norms as much with their partners. They say they are more to the right in matters political than the 25 - 34 year olds. They seem to have little interest in politics, don't talk about politics, and are indecisive in their voting. And even further to the right are those 15 and up who say they are less inclined to divorce, abortion, or extra-marital affairs. Those 18 - 24 give the best ear to the Church, which changes when they are 25 - 34.

Those between the ages of 18 and 24 are the ones who give most attention to the voice of the Church, a situation which changes immediately between the ages of 25 and 34.

It is curious to note concerning matrimony that there is a return to the traditional style among most young people. Young Spaniards have a greater preference now for religious marriages, but this does not imply that in regard to being a couple they are much freer.

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<sup>1</sup> Andrés Orizo. *New Values of the Spanish People: Spain in the European Survey on Values 1991*. Saint Mary Foundation, Madrid

There was a significant increase in the acceptance of complete sexual freedom between 1981 and 1990.

## **The youth group**

Javier Elzo proposes this hypothesis: there is no homogeneous category of youth justified by the sociological analysis. This does not exclude the possibility of some comparative study of young people, their behavior or values. He identifies six sociological groups among the young:

### **Group 1 - Passive, uninvolved**

These young people are passive, “lazy,” not involved in institutions, and do not trust or work in any new social movements. These young people typically think only about having a good time, enjoying themselves without any of the complications reality imposes. According to the data, 10.11% of youth belong in this category -- mostly male, somewhat below the median age. 8% are from the higher social classes, and many live in big cities. A variety of reasons make us think of this group as people “without feeling,” members of the “urban tribe” very similar in some ways to the “X generation.”

### **Group 2 - “Integrated”**

34.42% of youth belong to this largest of the six typical groups.

Mostly female, younger than the others, and of a lower social class, this group sits at the political center. They give high marks to Catholic religious institutions, are idealistic and willing to take on responsibilities. They have more confidence in institutions and social movements [especially those that conform to their religious beliefs] than their contemporaries. Christian groups [parishes, catechists, etc] gain members from this group.

### **Group 3 - Postmodern**

The survey indicates that 24.3% of Spanish youth should be included in this group. This group of young people have a high academic level and are older, above the median age. They have the preferences of leftist youth, and show a little interest in the institutional dimension of religion. They are very interested in certain social movements, like conscientious objection, pacifism, ecology, the gay movement, and the feminist movement. They have little confidence in institutionalized movements such as politics, the armed forces, and the church. They are very aware of the marginal people in today’s society who are unemployed. They are clearly permissive with moral issues of a personal or private type (such as sexual activity and the use of alcohol and drugs), but more rigorous about behavior in the political arena.

### **Group 4 - “Reactionary”**

According to the data of the sociological study, 15% of those interviewed belong to this group. The first and most important characteristic of this group is its negative stance on current social movements in the society: for example, pacifists, the rebellious, human rights advocates, those for racial equality, for support to AIDS victims, the gay and feminist movements, ecologists and antinuclear advocates, among many others. This is a clear portrait of youth strongly opposed to sexual liberty or abortion.

The broader profile is of a young man of the middle class (and including the low-middle class) who lives in a population of less than ten thousand. He is reactionary to the new social movements, with the very “traditional,” and hereditary, morality of his family, and very much to the right.

These Spanish youth are the most intolerant toward immigrants, refugees, the marginal, etc. Some of them become violent and are called 'fascists' by their contemporaries.

### **Group 5 - Radical**

This appears to be a minority within Spanish society. There are some regions in which they are more numerous, and united to the nationalist radical movement. According to the study that we mentioned, they represent 2.17% of the youth, but this group is the most homogeneous of all.

This group is represented mainly by males somewhat below the median age, with very little membership in the upper and middle-upper social classes. University students with a high percentage of scholastic failure abound in this group. They are very radical in politics, anti-institutional, yet insist that the government solve their problems. They reject institutional religion, and the sociologists indicate that they are the remains of a kind of youth who are doomed to disappear.

### **Group 6 - "Liberal Conservative"**

This is the most conservative and traditional group of all. According to the survey, some 13.86% of those interviewed belong to this group. In many things they are conservatives, but they come close to "pasotismo" in justifying their behavior -- such as getting drunk, being rowdy and making noise in the streets at night, being sexually active outside of marriage, etc. They reject the use of drugs. They do not appraise highly, and sometimes negatively, new social movements. This group is not critical of institutions, but are people who use society simply for their own purposes. They are competitive, but without much might. They are a type off "social parasite".

Each kind of group (within this outline we've sketched) can be of quite significant when the time comes to plan for and organize pastoral work with the youth.

### **Are Culture and Evangelization related?**

Some time ago, the Church intensified its reflection on this question. Pope Paul VI wrote  
*the rift between the Gospel and culture is, without doubt, the drama of our era. EN.20*

Pope Paul VI, in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, proposes the synthesis of this process of thinking and the beginning of a new ecclesial thrust. The Encyclical identifies the mission of the Church as Evangelization (¶ 14) highlighting three fundamental elements: the missionary (¶ 23); the evangelical humanization of the cultures (¶ 18-20); and the liberation of the oppressed (¶30-39).

The following paragraph is specially significant:

*Evangelization loses much of its impact and its efficacy if the specific people to whom it is directed are not taken into account; if their language, signs and symbols are not used; if it does not respond to the questions that they ask; and if it does not get down to real concrete life situations. (¶ 63)*

More recently, John Paul II has presented inculturation as one of the fundamental aspects of the total evangelical action of the Church, alluding also to the reciprocity of the relationship between the Gospel and the cultures to which it is preached.

It is good to remember that cultures are not directly evangelized, the people in the culture are. Evangelization works freely in one culture or another. The servants of the Gospel cannot impose their own cultural frameworks or structures; instead, they must be witnesses to the creativity of the Spirit who is also present and working in everyone else. surely it is the people of each culture who allow the Church and the Gospel to take root in their lives.

## **The practice of inculturation in the youth cultures**

Practical substitutes are impossible. What is certain is that to inculturate oneself is not to disguise oneself or make believe that one is what one is not. A man 50 years old or more cannot make himself out to be 20. All the things he does for inculturation will be done from his own values and experiences. He cannot fake it. This is a major difficulty with direct inculturation

The only valid point of departure is to decide to work honestly from inside the shared experience of the Christians and unbelievers in a secular and significant culture. The experience thrives in a ground of respect and friendship, inviting mutual dialogue and the sharing of common problems. This exchange roots itself in a sharing of one's own life and in a commitment to collaboration in the work of liberating and developing the people, and in the attempt to share values and experiences.

## **Youth mission**

All evangelical tasks presuppose the proclamation of Jesus Christ as the best answer to the needs and hopes of every person and every society. In particular, the Youth Mission intends to:

- 1- Bring about a personal encounter of each young person with Jesus Christ, The Way, The Truth and The Life.
2. To help the young people to respond with courage and generosity to the God of Jesus Christ whom they are searching for, who calls them and who needs them.
3. To foster the integration of the young people into parish life, in groups already existing, or in those groups that result from the mission, those groups that will help the young people to mature in their personal faith within the activities of the Youth Ministry (for example, Vincentian Marian Youth, or another group that they would prefer.)

### **I. Participants**

We gather all the youth of the parish. We form two groups in this way:

- Adolescent Youth (14 - 17 years old)
- Youth (18 years old and up)
- Another possibility is to work with all the ages together. ]

In this way, depending on the predominance of one age group or the other, we should have a determined Youth Mission. (It does not work the same when the larger group is made up of adolescents than when the group is mostly young adults. Generally, when the young adults are more active, the dynamics of the youth mission seems to have a more profound impact. Special attention should be paid to the groups of older youth, because it is from them that the moderators of the young adult and pre-adolescent groups will emerge. They are the ones who will minister to the youth of the parish.)

## **II. Gathering**

This invitation extends from the time of the pre-mission, with its home visits, thru the discussions on the process of the Mission and contact with the people who are close the parish. These people would have been making a point of inviting the youth to get involved in the total dynamic of the mission, especially in the parts that would be of most interest to the young.

During the mission, the gathering of the youth of the parish is done by::

- the priest and parish team
- involved youth invite those not involved
- the missionaries from outside

The environments where these encounters might happen are:

- The study centers (visited by the missionaries the week before the beginning of the special activities for youth.)
- Work centers
- Amusement Centers (Missionaries and youth involved in the parish visit the discotheques, Pubs, night clubs, during the week end to invite the youth )
- In the Christian Family Assemblies
- In the visits of the missionaries to the houses, whether it be to visit the sick, or to visit an assembly...wherever they can encounter the youth and invite them to participate.
- During the general larger activities of the mission (handing out flyers)
- Informal contact (planned or accidental) with the youth to invite them to gather together.
- Radio and TV programs.

The advertisements for the gathering could be:

- \* Youth mission posters
- \* Personal letters sent to all the youth of the parish by the pastor or the missionaries.
- \* Handouts with a schedule and invitation to the mission.
- \* Advertisements on the radio and TV.

## **III. Schedule for organizing the youth mission**

### **A) During the days of immediate preparation:**

The missionaries make contact with the parish's more involved youth in their groups and with other groups not strictly of the young. We help them to be aware of this moment of grace with which the Mission would bless their participation, especially, if they could gather the others in to:

- The Christian Family Assemblies (some of them can be the animators, others can offer their homes for the assemblies)
- The meetings on Friday and Saturday of the first week are especially for them.
- The general gatherings of all the youth held the second week of the mission.

### **B) During the first week of the mission**

Besides participating in the Assemblies, as we have mentioned, the presence of youth is important to encourage, and we need to seek out ways of making contact with young people at work, in school, in the places where they have fun. . . We look to connect with the natural leaders in this group, advertise the Mission for youth. Perhaps during the week end, we might have a poster contest.

### **C) During the second week of the mission**

Besides participating in the general activities of the mission, (especially in the Eucharist and Opening Sermon in the Church), we suggest daily meetings.

In dealing with the dynamics of the youth mission, go ahead and look for an experience of faith. They should not be standardized catechetical instructions centered on intellectual knowledge, but rather, lived experiences shared interactively by the young people. Songs with messages are basic, as well as moments of prayer, group dynamics, audiovisual aids. . . Make sure the environment is welcoming and gives the right motivation for participating.

## **IV Follow-up to the mission.**

- Plan only one concrete pastoral project for the youth (suggest the Vincentian Marian Youth)
- Find a team of youth Ministers, organizers and coordinators
- Set the organization of groups, the times, places of meetings, and the Youth Pastoral Moderators assigned to each group.
- Make sure the Missionary Team (or Youth Pastoral Team) is present for the orientation and formation of the Youth Pastoral Moderators.

Translation: Arthur Kolinsky, C.M.

# CATECHISM TO THE YOUTH

*Malang (Indonesia),  
Fr. Astanto Adie, CM*

## **Introduction:**

I will start my presentation with a brief description of the social, economical and political situation in Indonesia. This is by way of background to our Popular Mission topic: Catechism to the Young. In the following parts, I will share some information about the catechism we use to catechize the young and its contents. At the end, I will give some reflections and some difficulties we face in our Popular Mission.

## **Part I: Social and ecclesial situation**

### ***1. Social, economic, political situation***

Our country is a developing country. There is development in almost every aspect of our lives: social, economic, cultural and religious, especially for our brothers and sisters who are Moslems. We are in the stage of transition, going from an agricultural way of life to an industrial way of life. Besides this internal change, we also welcome foreign investors and tourists. So there are many facilities fostering an easy-life style.

There are five formal religions in Indonesia: Islam, the majority, Christianity, both Catholic and Protestant, Hinduism and Buddhism. We have a good relationship among the different sects. Nowadays, this peaceful life and valuable relationship is colored by some politically motivated incidents that gave the impression that this relationship is not as good as it really is. The Christian Churches always seem to be the victims. To outward appearances, it seems that the Moslems are dominating our country in all aspects of life: cultural, economic, political and social.

In such a situation, we are facing several problems:

1. A secularization of life: a compartmentalization of mundane life and religious life;
2. Moral principles are neglected, such as the rights of poor people, human rights, etc.
3. A kind of fear among Christians to confess their faith and Christian identity.

### ***2. Ecclesial Phenomenon***

The Indonesian Church is growing. Every year we baptized many infants and adults. Since the end of 60s, we have promoted an attitude that describes us as “fully Christian and fully Indonesian.” As an implementation of the spirit of Vatican Council II, our church is trying to involve the lay people to take an active part in all aspects of the church, including catechesis. There has been Christian Leadership training for both political leaders in decision-making-positions, and for lay persons involved in maintaining pastoral works.

Nowadays, there are many social action movements done by the Catholic Church and by individual Christians. Our concern is that the latter merely use social analysis as the basis for their action and not solid theological or scriptural principles.

## **Part II. Catechism to the youth in our popular mission**

The actual giving of the Popular Missions lasts 7 - 10 days. In the mission itself we divide the people into three categories: (1) adults, (2) youths and (3) children. I would like to talk only about the youth.

### ***1. Specific Objectives of the Catechesis to the Youths***

Our specific objectives are:

- (1) To motivate and animate our youth to live out their Christianity in every aspect of their lives;
- (2) To give a spiritual and psychological background to help them become mature;
- (3) To give some skills which are important for their growth in psychological and spiritual maturity.

### ***2. Kind and Process of the Catechesis: "Catechesis of the Peoples" (Indonesian: "Katekese Umat.")***

We use a catechism called "Catechesis of the Peoples" (*Katekese Umat*). This kind of catechism tries to integrate a theological approach and an anthropological approach. The history of salvation is realized in the concrete lives of people. So human history is understood to be a manifestation of salvation history. This understanding urges all Christians to realize that as human beings we should live lives based on the history of salvation, that is, Revelation, Scriptures. On the other hand, we believe that the Revelation of God really touches the lives of people today.

In this catechesis, themes are taken from the concrete life of the people (anthropologically) and also from the Scriptures (theologically or scripturally). Real life consists of personal experiences, natural events, communal experiences as well as historical experiences. In the Scriptures, we can find many of these themes -- creation, sin, grace, vocation, conversion, etc. (in the Old Testament); charity, mercy, a Loving Father, the Early Community, etc. (in the New Testament).

This catechesis is called "catechesis **of the peoples**" because its source is the people: it is for their sake, for the actualization of their faith, and it is implemented by the people themselves. By using the words "its source is the people," I refer to the actual situation of the people; the phrase "for their sake" refers to the idea that faith goes together with life. It is hoped that by this catechesis the people will actualize their faith in their lives.

This catechesis goes through three steps. First, we start by pointing to an actual life situation (social, political, Ecclesial, cultural, religious, etc.) or a scriptural story as a problem to be discussed by the people. We ask their commentary about this matter. In the second step, we come to the theological approach. Here we can use either one method, by itself, or integrate the two methods together. We may use a scriptural approach to address the problem

or an approach that emphasizes the teaching of the Church. Or, we may use a method that uses both scriptural and Church teaching. We ask them to reflect on what Christ would say if He were alive in our time; we also ask people how they would answer the challenge in the light of what the church teaches. In the third step, we lead them in a reflection/discernment process regarding God's will in this specific situation. It is then recommended that the people make an action plan: "Faith without works is dead!" [James 4]

To say something about "strengthening youth skills:" it is our desire to increase "practical" skills in our youth. In this training we use specific activities for learning critical skills. Sometimes we integrate the teaching of skills with the teaching of values in the variety of activities. For example: we ask a group of six people to conduct a drama about anything taken from their actual experience. By this drama, they practice expressing themselves (*performance*), their way of speaking (*public speaking*), imagining the characteristics of another person. Drama teaches self-confidence, etc.

### ***3. The Content of the Catechesis***

We classify the content of our catechesis to the young in three categories:

- (1) Category of knowledge: Vatican Council II about the Vision and Mission of the Church; roles of the laity; Evangelization; Social Teaching of the Church; Local and National Political Situations, etc.
- (2) Category of Spirituality and Personality of a Christian: Spirituality of the laity; The Church in the World; To be Light and Salt of the Word; Who am I?; Building a Healthy Personality ("Seven Habits"), etc.
- (3) Category of Skills: Managerial Principles, Organization, Leadership, Conducting Meetings, Facilitating, Public Speaking, etc.

### ***4. Notes:***

The Process of our Popular Mission uses this structure:

1. Pre-Mission: inventory of the situation, preparation
2. Proper Mission : 7 -- 10 days
3. Post-Mission: follow-up:
  - a. giving materials for regular meetings of the people;
  - b. evaluation and workshop/training: once in three months;
  - c. 7 - 10 day missions once a year, for three years.

## **Part III: reflection**

### ***1. The Results I Obtained***

As far as we know from our follow-up, we find that some youths have already taken part in the catechesis of the children, involved in the activities of the young. Some of them proposed themselves to be coordinators, with some plans to improve their groups. Some have participated in social organizations.

## ***2. The Problems/Difficulties***

Beside those results, we had some difficulties. I would classify the difficulties in three categories, i.e.:

### *1. Regarding the Team*

- we don't have the same vision about the catechesis to the young;
- we need a practical psychological approach and knowledge of group dynamics;
- our numbers are not enough compared to the number of youths, especially if we orient our catechesis to human development;

### *2. Regarding the Youth*

- The interests of youth are really very different from ours; they tend to enjoy life and the things of the world. We find it very hard to motivate them to join in the mission;
- most of the youth go to the city for education or work; we can't get them to stay involved in parish activities.

### *3. Regarding Resources:*

- we have limited resources; but we are trying to work with what we have, and to be creative.

## ***3. The Teaching I draw from the Vincentian Mission:***

1. I am convinced that St. Vincent did what the Church called him to do. He wanted to revitalize the Church with the participation of all the members of the Church: priests, sisters, lay people. This is what the Popular Mission is doing.

It is time to awaken the Church by motivating all the members to live Christian lives in their actual situations. I think this is what Our Lord really wants: Everyone who has heard the Good News should spread that joy to the world. This is our Vincentian duty.

2. Economic growth and modern life are affecting our way of life. It seems to me that people are becoming individualistic. At the same time, we realize that nobody can live alone. I see that everyone needs personal contact, personal relationships. Personal and full-hearted dialog and human contact will bring back those away from our Church. Our Popular Mission should actualize personal and full-hearted dialog and human contact as a kind of New Evangelization.

# **The church of panama**

## **National commission of missionary animation**

### **Conam**

#### **The follow-up to the mission**

*Sister Sylvia Lopez Hernandez*

#### **I. Introduction**

##### **1. The National Commission on Missionary Animation**

###### **a) Objectives**

The National Commission of Missionary Animation, was created by the Episcopal Conference of Panama (C.E.P.), in the context of the preparation for the Fifth Centenary of the First Evangelization of the Americas.

The C.E.P. gave a mandate to realize “a missionary program, diocese by diocese with the intention of bringing the mission program already designed to all of the Dioceses in the whole country”.<sup>1</sup>

The objective of this missionary animation was to “revitalize the missionary conscience of the church in each and every one of its members, especially the laity.”<sup>2</sup>

The Vincentian Missionary Team (EMIVI) was asked to take charge of the coordination of these missions. The commission consisted of Fr. Tom Sendlein, C.M. and Fr. Francisco Barcnas, C.M., who presented the missionary plan that they were doing in various parishes in Panama, Salvador and Guatemala. From this group arose what was known as the steering committee.

#### **II. Description of the experience**

##### **A) Popular Mission**

The project of the National Mission taken up by the Vincentian Team has been one of the greatest challenges, historically speaking, that has taken place in the church of Panama.

Fr. Tom Sendlein, C.M. here present, said with regard to this proposal of the Bishops, “We (EMIVI) wanted that some doors be opened to us, suddenly, all of the country was open to us.”

As soon as it was organized, the CONAM began to work on the organization, the content and the methodology.

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<sup>1</sup> Message of the Episcopal Conference of Panama. 5. Feb.1, 1987. No. 8C

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., No.5



The Popular Mission, to whom was it directed?... Without a doubt and keeping in mind the Vincentian spirit that animated the mission, it was directed primarily to the most abandoned of the church, to the most poor, the marginalized, the indifferent, so much so that the proclamation of Jesus and his Kingdom would be the main line of thought for all the contents of the mission for the children, the youth and the adults. The mission would have the character of Evangelization and not Sacramentalization. The theme that accompanied this mission would be “*New people, in new communities, for a new society*”

The Bishops of each Diocese were visited, then the pastors, who were to organize their parishes, do a census, divide the parish into sectors, organize the various committees for food, transportation, lodging, etc. the most important part was the preparation of the mission centers. While this process was going on, the CONAM was dedicated to motivate and recruit the future missionaries who were given two intense formation weekends consisting of training in content, methodology, dynamics, songs, etc. The formations were given by the Steering Committee that were responsible for all the formation and organization with the help of some lay people. The missionaries began missioning Diocese by Diocese, parish by parish, so that no community was without its missionary team.. The enthusiasm and the hopes in the parishes was growing. In all the Dioceses, they were talking about and waiting for the mission. The many lay people, hearing of the missions, began arriving spontaneously looking for their missionary formation. In the past 6 years, thanks be to God, more than 9,000 lay missionaries arrived to work on the missions, most of them men and youth. We took the mission to more than 3,000 communities with the help of the Missionary Teams. Of the nine Dioceses, eight were missioned we covered around 150 parishes and around 250,000 persons participated in the missions.

The essential work of the missionary teams consists fundamentally in family visits, even to the families that are not Catholic. In the mornings, there is work with the children, in the afternoon with the youth and in the evening with the adults. Each group has assigned to it its themes, dynamics and special activities. The family gathering that brings together three or more of the communities were very important events to gather together hundreds of people from the same parish. The Eucharist was the most powerful moment of the gathering, with vocational testimonies concerning the married life, religious life, and dedicated lay life.

### **B) Specialized missions**

Our program for the V Centenary, realized between 1987-1993 were years of intense missionary work, we want to note that the capital city of Panama was the last stage of the missions and here, we not only had the parish missions, but we took on some new challenges which were given to us by John Paul II in the “Redemptoris Missio” to make us reach “new Aeriopogi”. Panama city is a cosmopolitan city due to the Panama Canal, with a concentration of more than 47% of the total population of the country, with a capitalist commercial conglomerate, the Free Zone of Colon, where millions of dollars in imports and exports flow through every year toward Latin America, the Caribbean, and Central America. A Banking Area with more than 140 National and Foreign Banks. With a population made up of various ethnic groups: indigenous, African-American, Asian, mestizo, and others. This mixture of races and cultures can not be left out of our evangelization process. And so, our Specialized Missions sprang up. Eleven groups of special missions were organized with their own contents, methodology, and activities, they are:

1. Labor Mission .....for the companies and factories.
2. Education Mission...for schools and high schools
3. Hospital Mission.....for the sick and the medical teams

4. Prison Mission.....for the prisons
5. Family Mission.....take place for one week with families in all the Dioceses
6. Afroantillana Mission. With the various groups of the black race
7. Mission for the Chinese Community.. With groups of Chinese catholics
8. University Mission....Realized in 5 universities
9. Large Companies Mission.. With meetings of business people from companies and the active participation of these business people in the meetings.
10. Mission for the Legislative Assembly..for the men and women who legislate the country
11. Mission for the Public Forces...With the participation of many groups of the national police.

These specialized missions have been a great success for CONAN because the mission was able to reach many persons who, being catholics, do not participate in the church.

Finally, we ended the Mission in the city with a large procession with all of the parishes of the Diocese to give a public manifestation of our Christian commitment.

### **III. Follow-up of the mission**

The National Mission project, having been finished, the Episcopal Conference of Panama decided to continue the work realized by CONAN motivated in part by the petition of hundreds of missionaries asking for the continuity of this organization.

The Conference named me, Sister Sylvia Lopez Herrera, as Executive Directress. I belong to a Religious Congregation of the Missionary Catechists Sisters founded by a Vincentian, Bishop Francis Beckman, C.M., born in Holland, but arrived as a young man to Central America. In Panama, he had various assignments, among them, he came to be named Archbishop of Panama (1945-1963). As Pastor of this church, he felt the need to found a Missionary Congregation that would give answers to the lack of formation of so many poor and marginated people among the people of God. Our charism is definitely missionary and we feel that we are part of the Vincentian Family.

With this spirit, we assume the responsibility of carrying forth the task begun by Father Thomas Sendlein, C.M., here present, whom we want to thank in the name of all the missionaries of Panama, for the years he dedicated to missionary service, many of that time working for CONAN. Recently, on May 27th, he celebrated 25 years of missionary priesthood.

In our follow-up of the mission, we have been discovering how important this period or second phase of the mission, "The Follow-Up". One cannot think about organizing a Mission without thinking about the future projection of the objective of the mission. Our first concern about the follow up of the mission was: what can we offer so many parishes that, strongly animated by the Mission Teams feels the need of giving answers to the pastoral concerns of their communities. , children, adults were integrated. It was marvelous to see the enthusiasm principally of the people to continue this missionary tasks. We have insisted so much in the meeting with the groups that the mission does not end with the living of the missionaries, but that it continues in them, that now or to give them their support and present a new program of evangelization. In this time of post-mission more than 7.000 persons were left this post to work for their parishes, groups of different pastoral were organized, in which many youths We gave ourselves the task to re-organize our missionary work. It was necessary to revitalize the missionary conscience and continue maintaining all of our dynamic of animation, formation of the missionaries, and those hoping to be missionary,

continue offering program of missionary formation in the continuous and permanent manner. Our objective is to be able to offer to the parishes specific program for pastoral agents and empowering them to resume together with the pastor the evangelical tasks. We have organized itinerant missionary team that offer to the parishes, during all year, we also work in the creation of new didactic materials with specific objectives.

We can point out some concrete areas that CONAN, office to that parishes that ask for follow-up to the mission:

**1. Area of Formation:** This is the first that we offered to the pastor, this program have as objectives to initiate of process of formation with the persons that have been motivated by the participation in the mission. Our program are designed for systematic and progressive formation.

**2. Missionary Animation:** Within our specific objective is the commitment to maintain the Missionary Animation in the church of Panama, for this reason, during the year, we offer two or more formations on misallege and the concrete tasks of the mission. Another way to maintain the missionary animation is by means OF sharing what it means to be a missionary and what to do as a missionary, so we have: Afternoons of missionary animation, gatherings of missionaries from time to time, and missionary breakfasts/ dinners, these last activities, besides other objectives, help us economically.

**3. Parish missions:** We can say that this is the very heart of CONAN. All our work is focused on this end, to maintain and offer our missionary services to the parishes. Actually, we have some parishes that maintain their summer missionary program each year, other parishes ask for missions during the year at different times such as patron feasts, holy week, o some other special liturgical moment.

**4. Permanent formation of missionaries:** Many missionaries have remained as missionaries since the beginning of CONAN, we at this time have about 10 years at the service of Evangelization and many persons have dedicated all their time to missionary work. Some work full time, others part time, the majority during the summer months, during their vacations. For all of these missionaries and the missionaries that arrive each year, we offer missionary formation, these persons come from different parishes where we maintain close collaboration and communication.

All this process is part of the follow-up to the mission, in which we are helping and supporting the project of the National Mission with these concrete tasks. We maintain an attitude of disponability and openness to walk with and feel with the Universal Church and the local church. Actually, we are opening paths with our missionaries to respond to the most urgent Need, the Mission Ad Gente. We now have some young missionaries in Guatemala and there are others in the process of discernment.

REFLECTION:

Dear Vincentian Brothers:

In this short presentation, I have wanted to summarize 10 years of an intense missionary program. The National Committee of Missionary Animation, brings from its start, the Vincentian Spirit. It is a unique experience in Latin America in the context of the V Centenary, in the sense that it reached all the dioceses of the country with a mission geared to its own style and dynamic.

Perhaps now in preparation for the III Millennium other particular churches are working with this same plan.

The Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* of John Paul II indicates in Chapter I, #11 “The church can’t abandon the proclamation that Jesus, came to reveal the face of God and achieve the salvation of all people through the cross and resurrection. In the following lines comes the question, Why the mission? We respond with faith and hope in the Church: opening yourself to the love of God is true liberation. In Him and only in Him we are freed from all forms of alienation and oppression. Christ is truly our peace.

We can affirm that all missions that have the spirit of the founder Saint Vincent, has as its final objective to present Jesus Christ as the only road of Salvation and Liberation. From this encounter with the Lord, each person upon discovering the face of Christ, the face that is tender in the presence of a child, face that becomes brother with the poor, with the imprisoned, with the sick, with the elderly person, finally, the face that portrays love and freedom to all people that open themselves to the infinite grace of God.

These are sufficient motives to thank God for all the Vincentian works, for the presence and action of thousands of our brother and sister missionaries that today collaborate with the church to present the true face of God to all people, especially those in need of liberation. I think finally the organizing committee for inviting me to share our missionary experience.

Translation: Arthur Kolinsky, C.M.

## **The follow-up**

### **Importance of "continuity" or follow up**

*P. José Vicente Nacher, C.M.*

A priest asked his friend in whose parish a mission had just finished; "What did the mission leave behind?"

"And what happens after the Mission?" is also a question asked of us. It may seem a not-so important question to us, but there is no doubt that the future of the Popular Missions depends to a great degree on what the priests and pastoral agents see the effects of the Mission to be.

Popular Missions that have been well done and that end with satisfactory results for the places and people who requested the mission are the best promotion for new requests and the only goal that we can hope for. The Popular Missions are a service to the Church and as such, ought to be useful and show it! The popular mission does not exist just to be a popular mission: it responds to the objective of evangelization, and it is realized within a much wider pastoral context.

For this reason, outcomes are fundamental for the mission and we cannot leave them out in our serious planning for this ministry.

The questions we have asked ourselves and to which we try to respond<sup>1</sup> in this brief presentation are:

- + In the time after a mission, how responsible are the missionaries for the evangelical animation of the community?
- + What are the methods, materials, and dynamics that ought to be used in the follow up after the Mission?
- + Should the missionary team return? How often?
- + With so many various pastoral styles and concepts, is it possible to offer answers to the real needs of today's church?
- + Finally, how do we do an effective follow up?

### **Biblical and vincentian tradition**

Just as God does not abandon his people, so pastors accompany their people along the road of faith. The apostle Paul himself maintained a fluid contact with those communities that he had evangelized: he was always aware of what was happening in them, he wrote to them and sent his collaborators. ..

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<sup>1</sup>We are using the experiences of the Provinces of Spain and Portugal that were presented in Valencia at the Interprovincial Meeting on Popular Mission Teams in 1994.

Vincent de Paul and the first missionaries not only left the *Charities* established in the communities where they'd given a Mission, but they organized a follow thru. Let us remember that even Louise de Marillac began her collaboration with Saint Vincent as a visitor with the Confraternities of Charity.

The years from 1940 until 1965, in Spain and other countries, were a time of enthusiasm for the Popular Missions. Many parishes, in accordance with Canon Law at the time, systematically had a mission every 10 years. In a certain way, this regularity of missions constituted a follow up of the mission. In many places, for example in our parishes, it would not be a bad idea to revive this custom.

## Definition

In a group like this, with such a variety of experiences and processes, we have to clarify what we are referring to when we speak of *continuity, follow up, or post mission of the Popular Mission*. Among us, we are referring to the time right after the period of the few weeks when the Mission Team acts directly.

More concretely, we are concerned here with the continuity of the mission to the extent to which the missionaries are able to influence it: that is to say, anticipating it in the planning stage or designing it more completely during the Mission itself. This is to say that today, the follow up is part of the mission itself. For this reason, the missionary feels some responsibility for this part of the mission, too. This is brought about in conjunction with the ordinary responsible pastoral agents of the community.

We must not confuse *continuity of the mission* with renewal of the mission, or simply the upkeep of some groups begun during the mission. The idea of continuity makes reference to some objectives of the mission (missionary dynamics, style, message, group, lay ministries, services...) toward which the Mission worked. Therefore, it would make the Mission more effective if from the preparation period there be some broad objectives that focus on continuity or follow up.

In a special way, the Popular Mission itself is a part of the endurance of ordinary pastoral work. The continuity is inserted into the overall pastoral task, and energizes and supports its ultimate pastoral goals. During the follow up to the mission, the faithful of the community certainly must assume the challenging mind set of the missionary. As a consequence, this is when parish confirms itself as permanently missionary in all its actions and structures.

In simple words, we can say that if the Popular Mission means *evangelization, communion, reconciliation, proclamation, insight, commitment to the poor...then:*

*The follow up to the mission must include perseverance and development of these very same elements (evangelization, union, etc.) actively taken up by the Christian community that has had a Mission.*

Finally, as we try to further clarify concepts, let us remain clear as to what we think the follow up of the mission should **not** be:

- \* it should not be something cosmetic left in the parish to cover deficiencies;
- \* it should not necessarily be a direct increase in participation in the sacraments;
- \* it should not be something permanent that allows the pastor to work less;

\* it should not be just a warm memory that has no effect on the hearts of the faithful or on ordinary pastoral activity.

## **Experiences, proofs, opinions.**

### **What do the pastors who've had a mission say about the mission?:**

In a questionnaire done three years ago in parishes that had had a Popular Mission, we discovered the specific values that the pastors give to the post-mission. They do not consider it the single most essential element when you look at the whole total picture. Their dominant idea is that the post mission is as important as every other phase of the Mission

When asked about the repercussions of the Mission on parish life, no one said that the results were nothing or very little, even though some said it was superficial. The majority of the pastors gave high marks to the Mission as very **significant**, that is to say, the Mission left behind a lasting and varied influence.

Of all the more or less concrete realities that continued as results of the mission, **the pastors** valued most the creation of new groups in the parish (for the elderly, married couples, adult education, etc.)

Frequently, the *family communities, encounter groups, and parish assemblies* begun during the mission continued to meet. There has been disproportionately more continuity in urban parishes than in the very small villages, where it is difficult to find *prepared personnel* to take on the roles of moderators or animators. In some cases, the priest himself has to give the Family Catechesis in homes. In some other places, while the difficulty of meeting in the houses was overcome during the mission, the same problem surfaced afterwards and impeded the dynamic of the small groups.

In certain determined parishes, the pastors themselves testify that the active participation of the lay people increased and they noticed an increase in the interest in evangelization in the parish itself.

While in some parishes there was a notable increase in the number of people participating in the parish devotions, in others there was not much change.

In the follow up, the Family Communities, for their particular dynamic, need some material prepared especially for them. Sometimes, they use materials offered by the missionaries, and at other times, they use materials that they themselves have developed according to their own style, and sometimes they use the adult education programs of the Diocese.

Consulting with the pastors about the possibility of a return engagement of the missionaries (Renewal of the Mission), the answers are varied, reflecting their experiences, we think. Some see our return as not necessary, and some ask for us the next or second year. The majority think it is enough if the pastor asks for a mission. They do not want to close their doors, but neither do they want to go to extremes. We've noticed that if the pastors really desire the help (or need it), they'd rather work it so they get no more pressure than they want.

Some propose a repetition of the mission every ten years, as used to be done. There are some who suggest follow up visits of the missionaries not only as friends, but as evangelizers.

The local churches place in the Popular Mission their great hope for the renewal of the parish, especially for the return of those who have fallen away from the church. The follow up ought to be integrated into the appropriate parish and diocesan guidelines as is the entire Popular Mission.

### **What do our missionaries think:<sup>2</sup>**

We admit that the post mission or follow up is still the weakest part of the mission. We should be doing it, but, because it is basically part of ordinary pastoral work, we think this is properly the initiative of the pastor who has to coordinate all the activity that takes place after the mission. Let it never be said that we pretended to substitute for him in this role.

In some missions, after a few years, the Family Communities we formed have not only persevered, but New Communities have grown out of them. But most often there is a gradual decrease, even to the point of dissolution three or four years later.

In other places, the key to the continuity of the mission has rested with the young married group formed during the Popular Mission.

You have to try to foresee how the different groups which continue after the mission incorporate themselves into parish life and enrich it. Those who have encountered the Lord for the first time during the Mission, and those who have returned to the Lord, need special attention so they can adequately nourish themselves in their new awareness.

In general, we have noticed that long-lasting effects depend very much on the preparation and enthusiasm of the moderators of the Family Communities. The missionaries testify that the post mission is pre-determined by our first steps in the preparation period.

Follow up is easier where there is a clear community project. Where this does not exist, we know of no substitute that can provide continuity. There is always a need for people in the parish to concern themselves specifically with this ministry.

We have noticed a better understanding among the people of what the parish is after the mission. There are always some who become very actively involved in collaboration with us. During the follow up, team work gets strengthened.

And there have been times when the priests themselves experienced a great renewal of their spirit and pastoral dreams.

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<sup>2</sup> Based on the experiences of the Teams of the Provinces of Spain and Portugal.

## Some difficulties

### Difficulties expressed by the pastors

**Loss of enthusiasm** is one of the principle difficulties we find in the parishes during the follow up. The enthusiasm that worked so well during the mission lasted just a short time. Some of the *returned fallen away* go back to being *fallen away*. Those who were very involved *go back to their regular duties and can't do any more*. The pastor goes back to feeling alone without the support of the missionaries. With their expression "*it lacks strength*," the pastors indicate the feeling that the mission did not achieve its purpose -- it wanted to but could not, because it lacked sufficient people to continue the mission. There is a clear need and real priority to form pastoral agents.

Some expressed a need for adequate materials, although some provinces are very advanced in this regard. The suggestions of the missionaries need to be more concrete.

### Difficulties that the missionaries experience:

For the Missionaries, the **pre-mission** foretells what the follow up will be like. During the mission, the Missionary Team can work to repair deficiencies in the preparation; but after the mission, the errors made in the pre-mission can reappear.

Another practical difficulty is that the majority of the Provincial Mission Teams cannot do a follow up simply because they do not have enough time. The calendar fills up with this year's missions and up-coming pre-missions. Planning the follow up is very important and should be done, but it depends on the actual time the missionaries have to dedicate to it. We really need to have missionaries especially dedicated to follow up.

And the priests themselves are, in some cases, the impediment to a good follow up. This won't surprise any of you. Sometimes the problem is passivity: the necessary steps don't get done to organize and animate. Other times, the priests simply do not want to change anything they had before, and prefer to continue exactly as things were. In some cases, the Mission just becomes a story to tell.

In many cases, there is not enough pastoral staff to provide leadership for new groups, so you get a new youth group without a youth director, married couples without advisors, Family Communities without a sufficient number of moderators, or without anyone to prepare them... Usually, the persons best suited for this work are overburdened with many pastoral obligations even before the mission begins. Once again, we repeat, **the priority is to identify and form pastoral agents!!!**

### Some options for follow up:

1) The first option, which can seem to be the simplest for us, **is not to have a post-mission**. As soon as the missionary team concludes their work, the team says goodbye and the regular parish workers assume the responsibility of doing whatever will follow the Popular Mission. Or to put it another way, they resume their previous

tasks - but with some quantity and quality changes from the mission. This choice would be based on the conviction that it is these people who now will take care of their own evangelization.

2) Other choices, on the other hand, not only anticipate a follow up, but see the Popular Mission designed and developed in three phases that are done over three consecutive years. This would be, so to speak, like three missions one after another, with a single plan organized to go on for a long time.

3) A more radical option is to accept the responsibility for the parish from the bishop for two or three years. During this time the parish would be in a state of permanent mission. When the contract is fulfilled, we'd leave the parish, hopefully completely renewed. However, this is a type of Popular Mission that has its own difficulties.

4) The renewal of the mission (see Appendix I) is the most frequent. The Mission Team returns to the community where they gave a mission, generally the following year, for a short period of time - three days or a week - to revise, reanimate and renew the Popular Mission.

This might include: an evaluation meeting with the pastor and the moderators of the Family Communities; a convocation (for about three days) of the Family Communities that were functioning during the mission, including those that have not persevered; prayer and daily Eucharist; visits to the sick in the homes; youth meetings; celebrations with the children; Mass in the Communities. Different experiences and distinct objectives are possible.

5) In "Large Area Missions" there might be zones or parishes that were not affected by the Mission. It would be good sometime later to give another Popular Mission in that place, perhaps trying to correct previous errors or concentrate on those aspects that remained weak in the first attempt.

6) Sometimes, the bond that ties the missionaries to the parish is the "**special moments**" they shared. These can include important festivals of the parish or some special events in the schedule of activities. We can try to rekindle something of the **spirit that was lived and felt during the mission**. A type of personal friendship can exist with a community left behind where the missionaries have given a Mission.

7) There are those who, from the very beginning of the mission, present a **detailed plan (see Appendix 2)** of the content and strategies for a follow up that should be considered part of the activities that the parish and the Missionary Team have mutually committed themselves to. The missionaries return:

- in one month, for an evaluation of the mission and planning of the post-mission;
- in six months, to convoke a gathering of the Family Communities; and
- in one year, to do a renewal of the mission.

8) Some of you do Missions of various lengths, but I do not know much about them. I await your input.

## Proposals

For the benefits of the Popular Mission to last a long time, the most important thing is that all the members of the parish become convinced of the importance of

evangelization and that they focus all their different activities and organizations on this goal. Long after the missionaries have gone this focus should remain, and include an explicit recall of the mission.

These various proposals and suggestions are made here to help do just that. And remember, in one way or other, they have been used, although separately, in various places:

- The follow up [who'll do it, how, when, dynamics, initiatives, places) should be planned before the end of the main part of the mission. The missionaries and the priest ought to be in agreement about this, even before the main part of the mission.

A detailed plan ought to take into account:

- the necessary steps and the time needed.
- the persons in charge of each new task.
- regularity of the meetings.
- materials and other supplies to be used.
- plan ahead to the next visit [or not] by the missionaries.
- who will be in charge of preparing the moderators?
- parish assemblies.
- who convokes, and when are, the Family Communities meeting?
- celebrations during the main part of the mission with the Family Communities.
- evaluations of the mission and the follow up.
- convoking the people who have volunteered to collaborate in the commitment of the missions.
- forming and leaving behind, at the end of the mission, the *Permanent Evangelization Team* (replacing the *Parish Mission Counsel* which functioned during the preparation for and the mission itself.)

Every parish should have a Permanent Evangelization Team, which can be formed in part by the members of the Parish Mission Council.

This Evangelization Team is different than the Parish Council or any other group or movement in the parish. Its purposes are the following:

- to be concerned that the parish is an evangelizing parish in every possible way.
- that it is a **missionary parish**.
- to be the "missionary conscience" of the parish.
- to generate new initiatives of evangelization.
- to be the pastoral outreach to the fallen away.
- to be concerned for the perseverance of the Family Communities.
- to maintain and develop the input of the Popular Mission that will enrich the parish.
- to care for the collaboration with the Foreign Missions.

+ Although it has been mentioned before, we insist on the importance of an adequate formation of pastoral agents and preparation of materials.

- + As in all areas of life, those little "**human details**" are very important, such as: writing letters to the Family Communities (Christmas Time), visiting the priests, attending some of the parish festivals...
- + To unite this work with another principle end of the Congregation of the Mission, it would be very good to gather all the priests that were involved in our Missions every once in a while to have a retreat, or simply a gathering, or an evaluation meeting.
- + To empowering their new consciousness of Mission, ask their prayers for new Missions, and to collaborate in new ministries.

## **APPENDIX 1**

### **Mission renewal (three days)**

#### **Thursday**

Arrival of the missionaries:  
Meeting with the Pastoral Agents,  
Family Communities

#### **Friday**

Prayer and Mass  
Visit the sick  
Family Communities  
Youth

#### **Saturday**

Prayer  
Visit the sick  
Children  
Marriages

#### **Sunday**

Mass with the Family Communities  
(Parish Assembly)  
A common sharing

### **Mission renewal (one week)**

#### **Sunday**

Beginning of the renewal in the parish Mass  
Meeting with the Pastoral Agents

#### **Monday**

Prayer and Mass  
Visit the sick

Preparation of moderators  
Children

**Tuesday**

Prayer and Mass  
Visit the sick  
Family Communities  
Youth (up to 18 years)

**Wednesday**

Prayer and Mass  
Visit the sick  
Family Communities  
Youth (up to 18 years)

**Thursday**

Prayer and Mass  
Visit the sick  
Family Communities  
Couples

**Friday**

Prayer and Mass  
Visit the sick  
Penitential Celebration  
Youth (over 18 years)

**Saturday**

Prayer  
Childrens' Party  
Youth Vigil

**Sunday**

Mass with the Christian Family Communities  
A common sharing

**APPENDIX 2**

**A plan for continuity or follow up  
(A proposal)**

The Follow Up should be planned at the time of preparation for the mission. These planning sessions should include the pastor and his Pastoral Council (who will actually do the follow up), and the missionaries (who contribute their experience) .

1. The continuity of the Mission binds all the members of the parish. Together with the pastor, Mr. ----- will be responsible for:

- -----
- -----

2. As a result of the necessity for evangelization we have committed ourselves to during the Popular Mission, our Permanent Evangelization Team consists of the following members:

- -----
- -----

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3. Finishing the mission, there will be an evaluation meeting with the Pastoral Council and the Missionary Team.

4. During the two weeks after the mission ends, the Parish Pastoral Council will meet to:

- \* evaluate the Popular Mission and inform the Mission Team of its conclusions.
- \* dissolve the Mission Council and create a Permanent Evangelization Team.
- \* begin the initiatives suggested during the mission.
- \* after a few days, convoke the Family Assemblies.
- \* apply to the regular pastoral activity (sacraments, catechetics, ministry to the sick, marriages...) the new ideas that the Mission may have contributed in these areas.
- \* study any new initiatives that might strengthen the evangelical dynamic of the parish.
- \* determine who will be responsible for the preparation of moderators of the Family Communities.

5. During the important times of the liturgical year, Celebration Assemblies of the Family Communities should be convoked.

6. After a year, there should be a Renewal of the Mission.

English Translation: Arthur Kolinsky, C.M.

# THE FOLLOW-UP

## IMPORTANCE OF THE CONTINUITY

*Jésús Arzate, C.M.  
From the Mexico Province*

A priest asked his friend in whose parish a mission had just finished; "What did the mission leave behind?"

"And what happens after the Mission?" is also the question asked of us. It may seem to us a relative question, but there is no doubt that the future of the Popular Missions depends to a great degree on what the priests and pastoral staff perceive to be the effects of the mission.

Popular Missions that have been well organized and terminate with satisfactory results for the places and people that have requested the mission, are the best promotion for new requests and the only goal that we can hope for. The Popular Missions are a service to the church. The popular mission does not exist just to be a popular mission: it responds to the objective of evangelization, and it is realized within a much wider pastoral context.

For this reason, the continuity is fundamental for the mission and we cannot leave it out in our serious planning of this ministry.

The questions that we ask ourselves and to which we try to respond<sup>1</sup> in this brief presentation are:

- + In the time after a mission, what is the level of responsibility that the missionaries continue having in the evangelical animation of the community?
- + What are the methods, materials, dynamics, that ought to be followed in the continuity?
- + Should the missionary team return? How often?
- + With so many various pastoral styles and concepts, Is it possible to offer answers to the real needs of today's church
- + Finally, how to do an effective continuity?

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<sup>1</sup>We follow here the experiences of the Provinces of Spain and Portugal that were presented in Valencia at the Interprovincial Meeting on Popular Missions Teams in 1994.

## **BIBLICAL AND VINCENTIAN TRADITION**

Just as God does not abandon his people, so the pastors accompany their people along the road of faith. The very apostle Paul maintained a fluid contact with those communities that he had evangelized: he was always aware of what was happening in those communities, he wrote to them and sent them his collaborators. ..

Vincent de Paul and the first missionaries not only left the *Charities* established in the missioned communities, but they organized their continuity. Let us remember that even Louise de Marillac began her collaboration with Saint Vincent as a visitor with the Charity Confraternity.

From 1940 until 1965, in Spain and other countries, there existed a period of enthusiasm for the Popular Missions. Many parishes in accordance with Canon Law at the time, were systematically missioned every 10 years. In a certain way, this regularity of missions constituted a very continuity of the mission. In many places, as for example in our parishes, it would not be a bad idea to recover this custom.

### **DEFINITION**

In a group like this, with so many varieties of experiences and processes, we have to clarify what we are referring to when we speak of *continuity*, (*follow up, post mission of the Popular Mission*). For ourselves, we are referring to the time right after the days when the Mission Team acted directly ( during a few weeks).

More concretely, we are concerned here about the continuity of the mission to the degree in which the missionaries are able to influence it: that is to say, previously in its planning stage or more in a more advanced way with its accompaniment and animation.. This is to say that today, the continuity is part of the very mission and for that reason, the missionary feels some responsibility in that part of the mission. This becomes actualized and realized in conjunction with the ordinary responsible pastoral agents of the community

We must not confuse *continuity of the mission* with renewal of the mission, or simply that some groups begun during the mission continue persevering. The idea of continuity makes reference to some objectives of the mission (missionary dynamics, style, message, group, lay ministries, services...) for which the Mission worked. Therefore, it will be a great help to the mission if from the preparation period of the Popular Mission, that there be some wide objectives that take into account the continuity.

In some way, the Popular Mission in itself, is a continuity of the ordinary pastoral. The continuity is inserted into the pastoral, and tries to energize and support in its ends, the ultimate end of the ordinary pastoral. During the continuity of the mission, the faithful of the community must definitely assume the conscience of its protagonist missionary. As a consequence, this is the time in which the parish confirms itself as permanently missionary in all its actions and structures.

With simple words, we can say that if the Popular Mission signifies *evangelization, communion, reconciliation, proclamation, illusion, commitment with the poor...then:*

**The continuity of the mission** has to consist of perseverance and development of these very elements (*evangelization, union...*) actively assumed by the missioned Christian community.

Finally, continuing to try to define concepts, let us remain clear as to what we think the continuity of the mission should not be:

- \* it should not be cosmetics left in the parish to cover over deficiencies.
- \* it should not be -necessarily- a direct increase in participation in the sacraments.
- \* it should not be a permanent help so that the pastor works less.
- \* it should not be only a nice remembrance which has had no effect in the hearts of the faithful and the ordinary pastoral activity.

## **EXPERIENCES. PROOFS. OPINIONS.**

### **WHAT DO THE PASTORS MISSIONED HAVE TO SAY ABOUT THE MISSION:**

In a questionnaire done three years ago in parishes that had received the Popular Mission, we find the distinct values that the pastors give to the post-mission. They do not consider it an absolute essential in the face of all that is taken into account in the total picture. The dominant idea is that the postmission is as important as every other phase of the mission

When asked about the repercussions of the mission in the parish life, no one said that the results were nothing or very little, even though some said it was superficial. The majority of the pastors gave high marks to the mission as very **significant**, that is to say, the influence of the mission was left behind in various ways.

Of all the realities more or less concrete that were left as results of the mission, **the pastors** valued most the creation of new groups in the parish (elderly, married couples, adult education...)

Frequently, the *family communities, encounter groups, parish assemblies* begun during the mission continue to meet. There has been proportionally more continuity in the urban parishes than in the very small villages, where it is difficult to find *prepared personnel* to take on the roles of moderators or animators. In some cases, the priest himself has to be giving directly the Family Catechistic in the homes. In some other places, the difficulty of meeting in the houses, was overcome during the mission, but afterwards, the same problem surfaced and impeded the dynamic of the small groups.

In certain determined parishes, the very pastors testify that the active participation of the lay people increased and in general, that an increase in the interest in evangelization in the very parish was noted.

While in some parishes there was a notable increase in the number of people participating in the parish devotions, yet in others, there was not much variation.

In the continuity, the Family Communities, for their particular dynamic, need some material prepared especially for them. Some times, they use materials offered by the missionaries, other times, they use materials that they themselves have elaborated following their specific style, or sometimes they utilize the adult education programs of the Diocese.

Consulting with the pastors about the aptitude of a new presence of missionaries (Renewal of the Mission) the answers are varied, we imagine in consistency with the experiences. There are some who see it as not necessary, and there are those who ask for it the first or second year. The majority see it as adequate when the pastor solicits the mission. They do not want to close the doors, but neither do they want to implicate themselves in excess. On the part of the pastors, it is observed that if they really desire the help ( need it), before all, they prefer to maintain their anonymity without more external interference than they themselves ask for.

Some propose the repetition of the mission (every ten years as in other times). There are some that suggest posterior visits of the missionaries not only as friends, but as evangelizers.

From the local churches, there is a great hope in the Popular Mission for the renovation of the parish, especially a return of those who have fallen away from the church. The continuity, just as the entire popular mission ought to be integrated into the proper parish and diocesan guidelines.

## **WHAT DO OUR MISSIONARIES THINK:<sup>2</sup>**

It is recognized that the postmission or continuity is still the weak part of the mission. It ought to exist, but, it is opinioned that as part of the ordinary pastoral, this corresponds in the first place to the initiative of the pastor who has to coordinate all the activity that takes place after the mission. Let it never be seen that we pretend to substitute for him in this role.

In some missions, after a few years, the Family Communities formed not only have persevered, but New Communities have grown out of them. But the most frequent experience is that there is a progressive decrease, even to the point of dissolving three or four years later.

In other places, the key to the continuity of the mission has rested in the young married group which was formed during the Popular Mission.

You have to try to see ahead of time how the diverse groups, which remain after the mission, incorporate themselves into the parish pastoral and enrich it. Especially, the persons who have encountered the Lord for the first time during the Mission, or those

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<sup>2</sup>Gathering the experiences of the Teams of the Provinces of Spain and Portugal.

who have returned to the Lord, they need a place where they can adequately nourish themselves with the new awareness.

In general, it has been seen that the perseverance depends so much on the preparation and enthusiasm of the moderators of the Family Communities. The missionaries testify that the postmission is conditioned by the first steps of the preparation period.

The continuity is easier where there is a clear community project. Where this does not exist, there is nothing that can sustain the continuity. There will always be a need for certain persons in the parish who dedicate themselves specifically for this ministry.

Among the faithful, a greater awareness of "being part of the parish" is often evident after the mission. There are always some that incorporate themselves to collaborate more actively in the parish. During the continuity period, the team work gets strengthened.

Also, the priests themselves often have experienced a great renovation in their spirit and pastoral dreams.

## **SOME DIFFICULTIES**

### **DIFFICULTIES EXPRESSED BY THE PASTORS**

Among the principle difficulties that are found in the parishes in the moment of the continuity we can single out **the loss of enthusiasm**. The enthusiasm that functioned so well during the mission but later lasted just a short time. Some of the *returned "fallen aways go back to being "fallen aways"*. Those who were very involved *go back to their regular duties and can't do any more*, the pastor goes back to feeling alone and without the support of the missionaries. With the expression *"it lacks force"* he pastors indicate the sensation that the mission did not achieve its purpose, that it did not have sufficient personnel to continue the missions. There is a clear need and priority for the formation of pastoral agents

The lack of adequate material was also expressed, although some provinces are very advanced in this regard. They asked that the suggestions that the missionaries make be more concrete.

### **DIFFICULTIES THAT THE MISSIONARIES EXPERIENCE:**

For the Missionaries, the **pre-mission** indicates how the continuity will be. During the mission, the thrust of the Missionary Team is capable of fixing up the deficiencies in the preparation, but after the mission, the errors of the pre-mission can reappear.

Another difficulty, in the practical order, is that the majority of the Provincial Mission Teams cannot give any continuity simply because they do not have enough time. The calendar fills us with the missions of this year and the corresponding pre missions. This part is very urgent and should be done, but the continuity is conditioned by the disposability of the missionaries to dedicate time to this part. There is a great need for missionaries especially dedicated to the continuity.

The very priests themselves are, in some cases, the impediment for a correct continuity. Having said this here, I believe, has not surprised anyone. Some times, because of passivity, the necessary steps have not been done for the organization and animation. Other times, the priests simply have not wanted to change anything of what they had before, and have preferred to continue exactly the same. In some cases or others, the mission can remain as an anecdote.

In many cases, there are not sufficient pastoral agents to assume the animation of new groups: a new group of youth without a youth director, married couples without advisors, Family Communities without a sufficient number of moderators, or without anyone to prepare them... Normally, the persons most disposed to do this, already are overburdened with many pastoral obligations even before the mission. Once again, we repeat, **the priority to identify and form pastoral agents!!!**

#### **SOME OPTIONS FOR CONTINUITY:**

1) The first option, that which can seem to be the simplest for us, **is not to have a post-mission**. As soon as the missionary team concludes the work, the team takes its leave and the ordinary pastoral agents assume the responsibility of giving continuity to the Popular Mission. Or said in another way, they resume their previous tasks - but with the quantity and quality that the mission added. This is done with the conviction that it is the same community that now corresponds to persevere in its own evangelization.

2) Other solutions, on the other hand, not only look forward to the continuity, but see the Popular Mission as conceived and developed in three phases that can be realized in the context of three years consecutively. This would be, let us say, like three missions one after another, with the a joint plan organized to continue for a long time.

3) Another more radical option is that of assuming before the bishop the responsibility of a parish for two or three years. During this time the parish is in a state of permanent mission. Terminating the contract, the parish is left. It is hoped that it has been left well renewed. However this would be another type of Popular Mission which has its own difficulties.

4) The renewal of the mission (Annex I) is the most frequent. The Missionary Team returns to the community that was missioned, generally the next year, in a short period of time -three days or a week - to revise, animate and renew what was the Popular Mission.

This pretends to include: evaluation meeting with the pastor and the moderators of the Family Communities: convocation (about three days) of the Family Communities that were functioning during the mission, also include those that have not persevered, prayer and daily Eucharist, visits to the sick in the homes, youth encounters, celebrations with the children, Mass in the Communities. Here, there exists different experiences and distinct objectives.

5. In "Massive Missions" there might be zones or parishes that were not affected by the mission. It would be good some time later to give a New Popular Mission in that place, perhaps trying to correct previous errors or concentrate on those aspects that remained weak in the first intent.

6. In other occasions, the bond that ties the missionaries to "**special moments**" to which they are called. These can coincide with important festivals of the parish or some special moments in the programming of activities. Try to recuperate something of that **spirit that was lived and felt during the mission**. There exists here in the community missioned, a type of personal friendship that the missionaries have left behind.

7.) There are those who right from the beginning of the mission , present a **detailed plan**

(**Annex 2**) of the content and methodology of the continuity, that should be considered completely as part of the action that the parish and the Missionary Team have mutually committed themselves to follow. The missionaries return: in one month, for the evaluation of the mission and the planification of the post-mission: in six months to convoke a gathering of the Family Communities: and in one year to realize a renewal of the mission.

8) There are also other experiences like the missions of various months, but I do not know much about them. I await your input.

## **PROPOSALS**

In order that the benefits of the Popular Mission extend for a long time, the most important thing is that all the members of the community become imbued with the importance of evangelization and that they direct all the diverse actions and groups of the parish to this end. And this should be done long after the missionaries have gone and include the explicit remembrance of the mission.

In this sense, the various proposals and suggestions are made at this time, and know that in one way or other, they have been applied, although separately, in various places:

\*The continuity,(With its agents, means, time, dynamics, initiatives, places) should be planned before the end of the main part of the mission. In this sense, it behooves the missionaries and the priest to be in agreement, even before the main part of the mission. The detailed plan ought to take into account:

- the necessary steps to go through and the time needed.
- persons in charge of each new task.
- regularity of the meetings.
- materials to be used and other means.
- plan ahead to the next presence or not of the missionaries.
- who will be in charge to prepare the moderators.
- parish assemblies.
- who convokes and when the Family Communities
- celebrations during the main part of the mission with the Family

#### Communities

- evaluations of the mission and the continuity
- convoke the persons who have offered themselves to collaborate in the commitment of the missions.
- leave behind in existence, at the end of the mission, the *Permanent Evangelization Team* (Giving follow up to the Parish Mission Counsel which functioned during the preparation and actualization of the mission).

In each parish, there should have been created a Permanent Evangelization Team, which can be formed in part by the members of the Parish Mission Council.

This Evangelization Team is different than the Parish Council or any other group or movement in the parish- It has as its finality the following points:

- \*be concerned that the parish be an evangelizing parish in all aspects.
- \*that it be a **missionary parish**.
- \*that it be the "missionary conscience" of the parish.
- \*that it raise up new initiatives of evangelization.
- \*that it be the pastoral outreach to the fallen away
- \*that it be concerned for the perseverance of the Family Communities
- \*That it maintain and develop those inputs of the Popular Mission that will enrich the parish.
- \*that it care for the collaboration with the Foreign Missions.

+Although it has been mentioned before, we insist on the importance of an adequate formation of pastoral agents and preparation of materials.

+As in all realms of life, very important are those little "**human details**" such as: writing letters to the Family Communities (Christmas Time), visits to the priests, attend some of the parish festivals...

+In conjunction with other principle ends of the Congregation of the Mission, it would be very convenient to gather together all the priests that were involved in the missions every once in a while to have a retreat, or simply a gathering or an evaluation meeting.

+Empowering their new consciousness of mission, ask them to pray for new missions and to collaborate in new ministries.

**APPENDIX 2**

**PLAN FOR CONTINUITY (A PROPOSAL)**

The continuity should be planned for right from the preparation time for the mission. In the planning session, the pastor and his Pastoral Council (they will assume the realization of the continuity), and the missionaries (they will contribute with their experiences) .

1. The continuity of the Mission binds all the members of the parish. Together with the pastor, Mr. \_\_\_\_\_ will be responsible for:

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

2. As a result of the necessity for evangelization lived out during the Popular Mission, a Permanent Evangelization Team should be created, consisting of the following members:

- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

3. Finishing the mission, there should be an evaluation meeting with the Pastoral Council and the Missionary Team.

4. During the two weeks after the end of the mission, the Parish Pastoral Council should meet to:

- \*evaluate the Popular Mission and inform the Mission Team of its conclusions.
- \*Dissolve the Mission Council and create a Permanent Evangelization Team.
- \*assume the initiatives suggested during the mission.
- \*in a few days after, convoke the Family Assemblies.
- \*apply to the regular pastoral activity (sacraments, catechetics, ministry to the sick, marriages...) the new ideas that the mission may have contributed in these areas.
- \*study the new initiatives that might strengthen the evangelical dynamic of the parish.
- \*determine who will be responsible for the preparation moderators of the Family Communities.

5. During the peak times of the liturgical year, Celebration Assemblies of the Family Communities should be convoked.

6. After a year, there should be a Renewal of the Mission.

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3 de Septiembre, 1997

Cher Emeric,

Comment ca va? J'espere que vous ete bien. Je vais bien ici dans la parroise avec mes confreres et avec beaucoup travail pastoral. Je suis tres content pour l'experience del Mois Vincentien dans Paris. Je vous en remercie pour votre travail en l'organizacion du Mois. J'apprendais beaucoup sous Mision Populaire.

Je recevais votre lettre (e-mail) du 1 de Septembre, 1997. Vous me demandez pour la traduction anglaise du texte de Jesus Arzate "Acompagnando la Post Mision. J'ais une copie du texte y je le envoye a vous. par E-Mail.

I hope that it arrives okay. We don not have E-Mail here in the parish, but there is a local company, "Chiriqui Land Company", banana growers, that can send the document to you.

Merci pour tout votre atention pendant le Mois Vicentien. Mon bon souvenir a mes amis Pere Moloney et Pere Griffin e tout les confreres dans la Generalizia. Au revoir.

Bien fraternellement,  
Pere Arthur Kolinsky, C.M.

# **The Vincentian mission**

## **A Vincentian Response To the new Evangelization**

### **Final Document**

*The participants to the Vincentian Month*

## **I. Introduction**

Vincentian Priests and Brothers, Daughters of Charity, religious, and lay collaborators from different parts of the world gathered for a month in Paris from 7 July to 2 August 1997. We came together to share our experiences in this foundational work of St. Vincent, the Popular Mission.<sup>1</sup> Our experiences were as diverse as the group which represented 5 continents, 26 countries, and 35 provinces. Rather than create real barriers or difficulties, differences in race, culture, language, and sex, generated a great deal of excitement and enthusiasm.

The Month provided ample opportunities for conferences, liturgies, visits to Vincentian sites in and outside Paris, and dialogues both in small and large groups. These dialogues proved most formative in leading us to the height, depth, and breadth of the Vincentian mission: from the jungles of Mozambique to the sidewalks of New York, from the Altiplano of Bolivia to the city of Dublin, from the island of Cuba to the subcontinent of India. This offered us a real sense of the "world-Church."<sup>2</sup> In the spirited exchanges among ourselves, we learned innovative ways of presenting, understanding, and doing the Popular Mission. We were witnesses of ingenuity and creativity at work in the lives of our missionaries. More than the differences, we saw healthy commonalities that allowed us to affirm that what we were doing was truly Vincentian.

The high points of this encounter were the visits to places directly connected with St. Vincent. This was climaxed by a retreat at the Berceau, led by the Superior General. We drew very close to the "source" of the Vincentian Family, a homecoming of sorts. Fr. Robert Maloney, in his conference, boldly uttered for us what can only be described as the heart and soul of our vocation and of the Month:

*It is not diminished numbers in the Church that we must fear. It is not the loss of institutions. What we must really fear is the loss of fire in our hearts. What*

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<sup>1</sup>Robert P. Maloney, C.M., homily delivered in the Berceau, France on 19 July 1997 during the Vincentian Month on the Popular Missions.

<sup>2</sup>Karl Rahner, "The Abiding Significance of the Second Vatican Council" in *Theological Investigations* XX, 90-102; cf. also, "The Future of the Church and the Church of the Future" in *ibid.*, 103-114.

*burns in the heart of the true missionary is a deep yearning, a longing to follow Christ as the Evangelizer of the Poor.*<sup>3</sup>

## **II. The popular mission: "An evangelical response for our times."**

### **A. Description**

*"Evangelizare pauperibus misit me."* The richness and creativity of the call to evangelize which we have felt during this meeting have made possible our finding common elements which facilitate a description of a Popular Mission.

1. A prophetic, extraordinary, and intensive proclamation of Jesus Christ and of the Gospel by words and works.
2. Carried out during a specific time frame, following, generally, a pattern which includes preparation, realization, and follow-up.
3. Ordinarily realized by the local community and the Mission Team.
4. Aimed at reaching every person, inviting each one to be converted to Jesus Christ.

### **B. Vincentian Characteristics**

Based on our Vincentian identity, and reflecting on what we have learned during this meeting, these are the most prominent characteristics of our Popular Mission:

1. It is directed, first of all, to the poor and with the poor.
2. It proposes a new image of the Church as a communion of communities where the laity are promoted.
3. It stimulates lively and participative liturgies.
4. It fosters affective and effective charity within the community.
5. It promotes the social doctrine of the Church in order to sensitize the local mission community.
6. It is incarnated in each local reality.
7. It awakens and strengthens Marian devotion.

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<sup>3</sup>Robert P. Maloney, C.M., "The Vincentian Missionary Spirit: Yesterday and Today," Conference given at the Berceau of St. Vincent de Paul, France, 19 July 1997.

### **C. Missionaries**

The Mission is a collaborative action among various types of actors. We have enumerated them as follows:

1. The priests and those responsible for the mission community are the principal missionaries.
2. The Vincentian Missionary Team in collaboration with the local missionaries animates and coordinates the mission activities.
3. Collaboration among the various members of the Vincentian Family and others enriches the mission activities.

### **D. Formation**

It seemed to us that one of the key points of the Mission today is formation. It must be realized on the following levels:

1. To equip the missionary team with the necessary skills to respond to the needs of the mission community.
2. To form the laity of the local mission to insure the work of evangelization.
3. To evaluate periodically our missionary activity.

## **III. Proposals**

1. Empower the ministry of popular missions in our Provinces by aiding the mobility of our missionaries, and in the renewal of our works.
2. Set up an *International Secretariat for Popular Missions*, which would promote information, formation, and development. The same should be done on an interprovincial level wherever possible.
3. Foster the interchange of missionaries among the provinces of the C.M. and with other missionary groups, both on national and international levels.
4. Help in the creation of mixed teams of missionaries (priests, brothers, Daughters, Vincentian laity, and others) in each of our provinces.
5. Study, in the General Assembly, the participation of the entire Vincentian Family in the Popular Missions.
6. Assure the inclusion of preparation for Popular Missions in the initial formation of our candidates.

7. Invite specialists to participate in our provincial mixed mission teams in order to foster collaboration, strengthen our charism, and facilitate mutual communication.
8. Promote periodic meetings of Popular Mission Teams, both on regional and international levels.
9. Create, on the provincial level, a fund for helping the ministry of the Popular Missions.
10. Study, in the General Assembly or in an international commission, the theme of "Justice and Charity" in the life of the Congregation.

## IV. Conclusion

We, participants of the Vincentian Month '97, discovered many signs of hope for the future. In our exchange of personal experiences and dialogue, we have learned of the great diversity and creativity in the proclamation of the Gospel by means of the Popular Mission in different parts of the world. In the coming years we wish to stimulate and encourage new initiatives which include priests, brothers, sisters, laymen, and laywomen as members of our evangelizing teams.

As missionaries of the Vincentian Family, we will actively participate in the "New Evangelization" of the world in the Third Millennium. Our recommendations and proposals have been guided by the 1984 Constitutions of the Congregation of the Mission. Together with all the members of the worldwide Vincentian Family, we wish to continue to search for the means to give new vitality to the Popular Mission where we live and work.<sup>4</sup>

Mary of Nazareth, the first disciple of Jesus Christ and evangelizer, inspires us to be open to the Divine Providence of God. We give thanks to all holy men and women missionaries, especially St. Vincent, St. Louise, and our Vincentian Saints. In their lives we are challenged to become more holy and effective men and women for evangelization today.

As we return to our missionary work we recall the words of the Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, Fr. Robert Maloney, C.M., to us during our day of retreat at the Berceau of St. Vincent de Paul:

*To be missionaries \_ that is our calling. Breathe deeply, my brothers and sisters, of the missionary spirit that St. Vincent inspired in his followers. Let it fill your minds and hearts. Then, go. "Go into the whole world and preach the gospel to every creature."<sup>5</sup>*

Vincentian Month on the Popular Missions  
Paris, France  
August 2, 1997

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<sup>4</sup>CM Constitutions 14.

<sup>5</sup>Mk 16:15.

